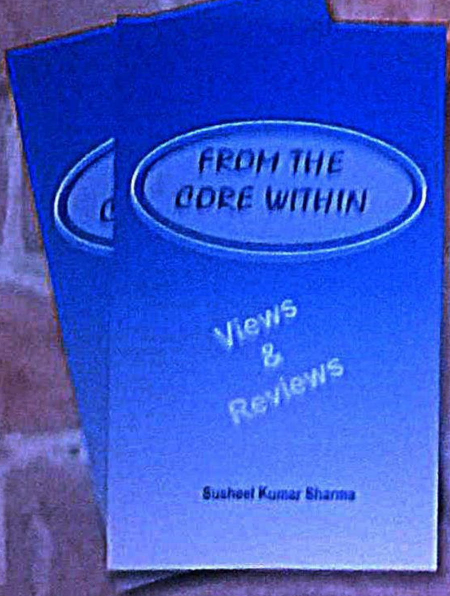
BRICKS AND BOUQUETS



FROM THE CORE WITHIN

Views & Reviews

Susheel Kumar Sharma

Edited by
SANJEEV KUMAR

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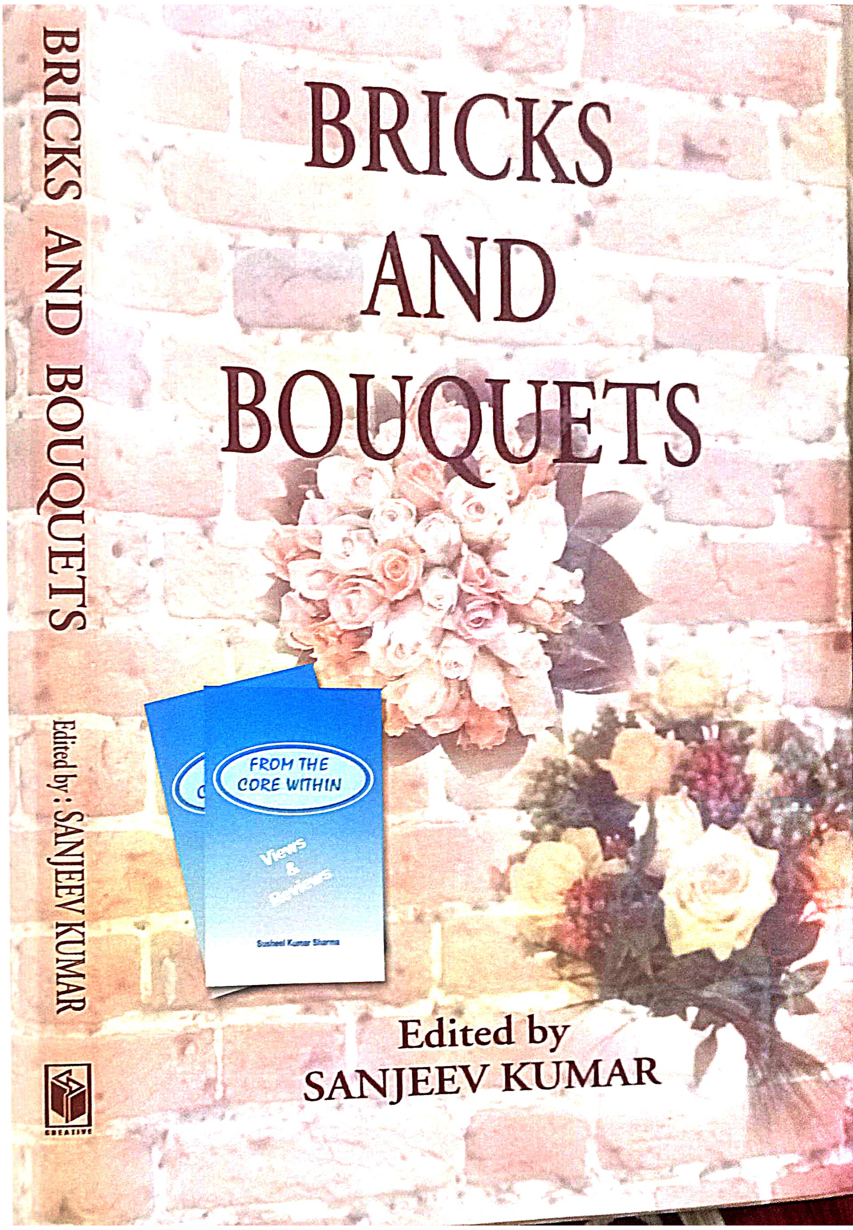
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Bricks and Bouquets promises to offer the reader a rare kind of experience. It is a collection of opinions expressed by a number of critics/ reviewers on *From the Core Within*, a collection of fifty poems by Susheel Kumar Sharma. The reviews collected here have appeared in several literary journals, magazines and dailies in India . The same have been attempted by serious readers who have gone beyond giving their cursory reactions and opinions simply by reading publishers' blurbs or even without having opened/ seen the book. While some of the reviewers lavish praise on the poet's style and approach, his irony, wit, social consciousness etc., there are others who question even the suitability of the titles of the work and the poems therein and describe the poems as immature and facile. It is the divergence of opinion that poses a challenge to the readers who are provoked to read and think and decide for themselves.

The book will be of interest to the critics and the poets, the students and the teachers of Practical Criticism and Creative Writing. It will help them understand several subtle issues in creative writing besides helping them in understanding various matrices of publishing poetry and criticism.

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(A collection of views and reviews)

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Dedicated
to the memory of
my revered parents
Dr R C Tyagi
and **Smt. Raj Bala**
who would have been
very happy to see this work.

FOREWORD

Bricks and Bouquets comprises a collection of views and reviews on *From The Core Within,* a book of poems by Sushil Kumar Sharma. The reviews, as the name of the collection very aptly suggests, do not express the same opinion about the book. Infact, the opinions are not only different, but at times diametrically opposite to each other. Yet, instead of creating confusion, these contradictory remarks have enhanced the value of the work *Bricks and Bouquets* to a great extent. The collection provides the readers full and comprehensive evaluation of Sharma's poetic genius, as well as his work.

This anthology has been edited by Sanjeev Kumar. He has received his training in Comparative Literature from a prestigious Department of Delhi University. The training gets reflected in the introduction where a vast survey of literature on poetry/poetics available in Sanskrit has been explored and summarized in very brief. Since a poetical work is a product of a particular culture, social milieau of a particular country. It is in fitness of things that the cultural and intellectual milieu of the particular country is explored in order to understand the pysche o the poet / the creative writer. This will a certainly generate a better understanding and empathic appreciation of the work. Further, his training in English literature has helped him in summarizing the views and giving a survey of Literature from Plato to Edward Said. Still the introduction leaves so many issues open to discussion and leave the reader to formulate his/her opinion. I sincerely believe that it will generate a desire in all poetry lovers to go through *From The Core Within,* by Sushil Kumar Sharma with great enthusiasm. Poetry is today something which people have to be gently persuaded to read. This slim volume will indeed help readers in understanding the complex and relevant issues raised by a poet who is a contemporary.

December, 2007 **– Jayanti Chattopadhyay**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I take this opportunity to thank all the reviewers who took the pains to analyse and wrote reviews from the best sensibility known to them and which resulted in a collection of thoughts that are unique, literary and nothing less than a wonderful eye-opener.

A thanks is also due to the magazines, journals and newspapers where the pieces first appeared.

Susheel Kumar Sharma allowed me access to his correspondence with various persons and helped me in understanding and appreciating 'poetry' better. It is indeed a rare treat for a critic to be able to converse freely with the writer he is writing about. I am indeed grateful to him for his patient replies to my editorial queries at odd hours.

Professor Jayanti Chattopadhyay is one of my esteemed teachers and I look the liberty of requesting her to write the 'Foreword', though, she was sorely pressed for time. Her love of poetry helped me to get her to write it in double quick time.

It would be unjust on my part if I do not mention Professor Jasbir Jain, R K Chaddha, Vasant K. Sharma, Archana Tyagi and Sharad Ranjan for their continuous prodding and persuasion. It would not have been possible for me, otherwise, to bring this anthology in time.

My family members also had been very patient with me and ignored my neglect of them. My wife Meenakshi and daughters Somya & Vadanya ascertained that nothing disturbed me while I was busy with this work.

Thanks are also due to Arundhati Vashishtha Anusandhaan Peeth (AVAP) who helped me in various ways in bringing out this book. Last but not the least, in this fiesta of thanks giving I would like to thank Sh. Tara Chand Tanwar of Creative Publisher for overseeing the prompt publication and making the anthology available in time for the release on the occasion of the opening day of 52nd Annual Conference of All India English Teachers Association on January 8, 2008 at Nagpur.

– Editor

INTRODUCTION

Bricks and Bouquets promises to offer the reader a rare kind of experience. It is a collection of opinions expressed by a number of critics/ reviewers on *From the Core Within*, a collection of fifty poems by Susheel Kumar Sharma. The reviews collected here have appeared in several literary journals, magazines and dailies in India. The same have been attempted by serious readers who have gone beyond giving their cursory opinions simply by reading publisher's blurb or even without having opened/ seen the book. While some of the reviewers lavish praise on the poet's style and approach, his irony, wit, social consciousness etc., there are others who question even the suitability of the titles of the work and the poems therein and describe the poems as immature and facile. It is the divergence of opinion that poses a challenge to the readers who are provoked to read and think and decide for themselves. Both bricks and bouquets received by the poet in the form of book-reviews and comments on *From the Core Within* are being presented here with the least editing so as to give a comprehensive view of different responses evoked by the poems.

Bhartahari, an Indian king, sage and poet, says that the time of an intelligent person is spent in reading, writing and appreciating poetry. Ruminating over the question 'Why should one read/ write poetry?', Mammatta, an Indian aesthetician has written "*Kavya* (literature) is for winning renown, for earning money, for acquisition of knowledge of practical affairs, for eliminating evil, for enjoying immediate inner pleasure (*Ánnand*), and for gaining instruction (*Upadesa*) of the wifely variety." Sir Philip Sidney describes them in terms of 'instruction' and 'delight'. But, the twentieth/ twenty-first century being the age of 'action' the expectations from poetry are of different nature and are there in terms of a happening. W. H. Auden cautions such persons saying, "Poetry makes nothing happen." In a similar vein Don Marquis writes, "Publishing a volume of verse is like dropping a rose petal down the Grand Canyon and waiting for an echo." However, it is almost incredible that the echoes of a first collection of the poems, *From the Core Within,* could be heard far and wide as it was reviewed so enthusiastically. This also indicates that poetry makes things happen its own way as it has its own readership, despite the contrary claims of the poets and the publishers.

It would be intriguing for the readers to find how the same line(s) of the poet evoke(s) different reactions from different reviewers/ critics. I. A. Richards and his followers theorised such responses as 'Reader Response Criticism'. No such attempt is intended here. However, I firmly hold that no response is entirely gibberish or represents truth in its entirety. Therefore, the attempt here is only to collate and juxtapose various views. This effort will make new critics, readers and reviewers form an independent opinion on various issues involved in the appreciation of poetry and the politics of criticism and publishing houses. In Indian context M. Prabha's *The Waffle of the Toffs* (Oxford & IBH, New Delhi, 2000) has done an incredible work to expose the matrix of the so-called big publishers and even greater poets (the adjectives could conveniently be exchanged with each other).

Historians of literatures in all languages have examples of the powerful critics and reviewers going wrong in the assessment of the contemporary budding writers being condemned, censured and over-praised. It was perhaps because of the contemporary contempt that a renowned Sanskrit poet, Bhavbhuti, said that he was writing for a person who might be born years after him but will have the same taste (*Samán Dharma)* and will appreciate his work. John Keats and Shelley are some the conspicuous examples in the Romantic age of English Literature. They have stood the test of time and have been accorded the rightful place in literary history despite adverse advises and predictions by their contemporary critics. Similarly, the example of John Donne who was dumped by the contemporary intellectual world but was retrieved in twentieth century by Grierson and Eliot, is another case in point. Contrarily, Byron has belied the hopes and expectations of the contemporary critics/ readers and could not withstand the test of time despite being almost a cult figure in his own age. Similarly, others who were exalted to the skies and honoured as Laureates in their own ages were consigned to oblivion by later generations. Poet Laureates like Sir William D'Avenant, Thomas Shadwell, Laurence Eusden, William Whitehead, Henery James Pye and Alfred Austin to mention just a few have now been confined only to a brief mention in the literary history books. The case is no different for some of the Nobel Laureates in literature in recent years. Thus, it can be assumed very safely that one should not rely on contemporary criticism very much. This stresses the importance of the role of judicious critics and understanding reviewers and the responsibility that not only the present imbues but also the future imposes on them. In the next two sections I propose to ruminate over the nature of poetry and criticism since *From the Core Within* has been described by the poet as a "book of verse" and the present work by and large a book of practical criticism.

If Bacon is considered some authority, we are ignorant about Truth because the jesting Pilate Pontius "would not stay for an answer." However, we are equally ignorant about poetry and its nature though various scholars of the world have tried to define it. Not only the practitioners of poetry but also the critics have tried their hands but the muse has always been above the bounds of any definition. Let me quote some of the authorities to see if there are any common elements among them:

> "Poetry is an art of imitation ... that is to say, a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth: to speak metaphorically, a speaking picture: with this end, to teach and delight... ."
> Sir Philip Sidney
> "Poetry is an imitation of nature by a pathetic and numerous speech." J. Dennis
> "Poetry is the art of uniting pleasure with truth, by calling imagination to the help of reason." Dr Johnson
> "Poetry should be simple, sensuous and impassioned."
> Milton
> "Poetry is the best words in the best order." Coleridge
> "Poetry is defined as an art, the fundamental principle of which is imitation, that imitation being through the medium of language." Aristotle
> "Poetry is metrical composition." Dr Johnson

"Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings; it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity." Wordsworth

"A poem is that species of composition, which is opposed to works of science, by proposing for its *immediate* object pleasure not truth." Coleridge

"A poem is the very image of life expressed in its eternal truth." Shelley

"... the essence of poetry is fiction." J. H. Newman

"Poetry ... we will call *musical thought.* The poet is he who thinks in that manner." Carlyle

"By poetry, we mean not, of course all writing in verse, nor even all good writing in verse. ... By poetry, we mean, the art of employing words in such a manner as to produce an illusion on the imagination, the art of doing by means of the words what the painter does by means of colour." Lord Macaulay

"Poetry is a passion... passion for truth...for beauty... for power. It illustrates them by fancy." Leigh Hunt

"Music, when combined with a pleasurable idea, is poetry; music, without idea is simply music; the idea, without music, is prose, from its definiteness." E A Poe

"Poetry is a criticism of life under the conditions fixed such a criticism by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty." Matthew Arnold

"One may write genuine poetry, and not be a poet; for whosoever writes out truly any human feeling, writes poetry." J. S. Mill

"Poetry is the deification of reality." Edith Sitwell

"Poetry lies way to truth." John Ciardy

"Poetry is not the record of an event." Robert Lowell

"A poem should not mean but be." Archibald Macleish

"Poetry is being, not doing" E. E. Cummings

"There is no money in poetry, but then there is no poetry in money either" Robert Graves

"In science one tries to tell people, in such a way as to be understood by everyone, something that no one ever knew before. But in poetry, it's just the opposite." Paul Dirac

"Poets utter great and wise things which they do not themselves understand." Plato

"Of our conflicts with others we make rhetoric; of our conflicts with ourselves we make poetry." W B Yeats

"No man was ever yet a great poet, without being at the same time a profound philosopher. For poetry is the blossom and fragrancy of all human knowledge, human thoughts, human passions, emotions, language." Samuel Taylor Coleridge

"Poetry … should strike the reader as a wording of his own highest thoughts and appear almost a remembrance." John Keats

"Language that tells us, through a more or less emotional reaction, something that cannot be said." E. A. Robinson

"The gap between verse and poetry is enormous. Between good poetry and good prose the gap is narrower." Michael Longley

"A poem is an instant of lucidity in which the entire organism participates." Charles Simic

"Poetry begins in delight and ends in wisdom." Robert Frost

"A poem begins as a lump in the throat, a sense of wrong, a home-sickness, a love-sickness. It is at its best when it is tantalising vagueness. It finds the thought and the thought finds the words. My definition of poetry (if I were forced to give one) would be this: words that have become deeds." Robert Frost

"Poetry is a language pared down to its essentials" Ezra Pound

"Poets are soldiers that liberate words from the steadfast possession of definition." Eli Khamorov

"No good poem, however confessional it may be, is just self-expression. Who on earth would claim that the pearl expresses the oyster?" C. Day Lewis

"[Poetry] is the product of society as the pearl is the product of the oyster." Christopher Caudwell

"A poet's autobiography is his poetry. Anything else is just footnote." Yevgeny Yentushenko

"What is a poem but a hazardous attempt at self-understanding? It is the deepest part of an autobiography." Robert Penn Warren

"A good poem tells us the truth about the world; a bad poem tells us a truth about the author." Larry

"Poetic language honours polarities. We use the language of poetry to provide the many levels of feeling, facets of knowing, simultaneously, so we can examine them and move forward." Peggy Osna Heller

"Poetry is not turning loose of emotions, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality. But, of course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things." T. S. Eliot

"Poetry is either something that lives like fire inside you—like music to the musician ... or else it is nothing, an empty, formalised bore around which pedants can endlessly drone their notes and explanations." F. Scott Fitzgerald

"Poetry is the language in which man explores his own amazement." Christopher Fry

"A poem is energy transferred from where the poet got it, by way of the poem itself, all the way over to the reader." Charles Olson

"A poem is a verbal artefact which must be as skilfully and solidly constructed as a table or a motorcycle." W. H. Auden

"Poetry, even when apparently most fantastic, is always a revolt against artifice, a revolt, in a sense, against actuality." James Joyce

"Poetry is impassioned truth." Ebenezer Elliot

"Poetry is feeling confessing itself to itself in moments of solitude, and embodying itself in symbols which are the nearest possible representations of the feeling in the exact shape in which it exists in the poet's mind." John Stuart Mill

I have not followed any particular chronological or thematic order in citing off hand above definitions/comments from some well known and some lesser-known personalities mainly from the Western

World. The obvious effort has been to highlight the varied response to the definition, idea, form, means and purpose of poetry from various thinkers, critics and practitioners of poetry in different ages and different geographical locations. Even the same person has not stuck to only one definition or a concept of poetry. The situation is no better in India as follows from the ensuing discussion.

In Indian poetics, poetry just a section of a large corpus of Aesthetics which derives its force from God (Natraja). There are large scale discussions on what poetry is, what be its subject, what be its source, what be its audience/readers and so on and so forth. Here I have selected only a few verses through which one has to meander to carve out once path as the scope and space are very limited at my disposal. Besides, the nature of Sanskrit discourse is such that in minimum words many issues are discussed as everything is seen in relation to another. Therefore, sometimes an untrained reader is likely to get confused. Thus goes my selection of various quotations from Indian texts:

Words of a poet, or his verbal creation, is the nimble definition of poetry. The poetic business lies in describing the world, which gives pleasures of ulteriority. In this vast world a poet is like the creator - Brahma. Elsewhere the *Agnipurana* defines that kavya (literature in general) is a fully matured verbal creation, sweetened with the nine fold relish and all sorts of riti (style), guna (poetic merits) and alamkaras (figures of speech).

वाग्वैदग्ध्य प्रधानेऽपि रस एवात्र जीवितम्
vagvaidagdhya pradhanepi rasa evatra jivitam.
Despite the importance of eloquence and wit, rasa alone is the life of poetry.

'कवेरिदं कार्यभावों वा' - कवनीयं काव्यं
kaveridam karyabhavova-kavniyam kavyam
Poetry is the work or emotion of the poet.

''काव्यं लोकोत्तरवर्णनानिपुणं कवि कर्म'' (काव्यप्रकाश)
kavyam lokottarvarnanipunam kavi karma (kavyaprakash)
A poet is a creator of the boundless poetic universe of imagination.

काव्यशब्दोऽयं गुणालंकारसंस्कशतयोः शब्दार्थयोर्वर्तते। भक्त्या शब्दार्थमात्र वचनोऽत्र गशहृयते (काव्यलंकार सूत्रवशतिः, भामहः)
kavyasabdoyam gunalamkarsanskritiyo shabdarthayorvartate / bhaktya şabdarthamatra vachnoatra grihayate (kavyalankar sutravrittih, Bhamah)
The poetic word combined with guna and alamkar indicates at word and its meaning. In sheer modesty it means the presence of word and its meaning. Poetry is borne out of alamkar. Beauty is figure of speech; ornamentation is alamkar; the poetic beauty is made by gunas.

अदोषौ सगुणौ सालंकारौ च शब्दार्थौ काव्यम्। (काव्यानुशासन, हेमचन्द्र)
adoshua saguno salamakarau cha sabdarthua kavyam
(kavyanushanan, Hemchandra)
Poetry exists in flawless language which is endowed with gunas and alamkaras, word and meaning.

गुणालंकार सहितौ शब्दौ दोष वर्जितौ। (प्रताप रूद्रयशोभूषण, विद्यानाथ)
gunalamkar sahitau shabdau dosh varjitau.
(Pratap Rudrayshobhushanam, Vidyanath)
Words endowed with guna (quality) and alamkar without flaws make poetic language.

शब्दार्थौ निर्दोषौ सगुणौ प्रायः सालंकारौकाव्यम्। (काव्यानुशासन, वाग्भट्ट)
shabdarthau nirdoshau sagunau prayah salamkarau kavyam (kavyanushasan, Vagbhata)
Often poetry is born out of flawless word and meaning endowed with gunas.

निर्दोषा लक्षणावती सरीतिर्गुणभूषणा।
सालंकार रसानेकवशर्त्ति कविकाव्यनामभाक्। (चन्द्रालोक, जयदेव)
nirdoshan lakshanavati saritirgunabhusana salamkar rasanekvritir kavikavyanam bhak (chandralok, Jaidev)
In a language which is without flaws with good poetic virtues good style endowed with guòas, alamkaras, rasas, full of eloquence, poetry is born.

निर्दोषं गुणवत्काव्यमंलकारैरलंकश्तम्।
रसाविन्तं कविः कुर्वन प्रीतिं कीर्तिं च विदंति (सरस्वती कंठाभरण, भोज)

nirdosam gunavtkavyamalamkarei alamkritam / rasanvitam kavi kurvan pritim kirtim cha vindati. (saraswati kanthabharan, Bhoja)

A poet who composes a poem which is flawless, endowed with gunas, alamkaras and rasas becomes beloved and famous.

शब्दार्थौ सहितौ वक्रकविव्यापारशालिनि
बन्धे व्यवस्थितौ काव्यं तद्विदाह्लादकारिणी।। (वक्रोक्तिजीवितम्, कुन्तक)

sabdarthau sahitau vakrakavivyaparshalini bandhe vyavasthitau kavyam tadvidahladkarini. (vakrokti jivitam, Kuntak)

Such poetry as is full of words meaning, obliquity is artistically structured and is organized, alone gives pleasure.

तददौषौ शब्दार्थौ सगुणावनलंकृती पुनः क्वापि। (काव्यप्रकाश, मम्मट)

tadadoşau şabdarthau sagunavanlamkriti punah kwapi (kavyaprakash, Mammat)

Poetry should be composed without faults of inappropriate diction with gunas, alamkaras, word and meaning.

गुणवदलंकश्तं च वाक्यमेव काव्यम् (काव्यमीमांसा, राजशेखर)

gunavad alamkritam cha vakyam eva kavyam (kayamimsa, Rajshekhar)

A sentence full of guna and alamkar is poetry.

काव्यशोभाकरान् धर्मान् अलंकारान् प्रचक्षते (काव्यादर्श, दण्डी)

kavyasobhakaran dharman alamkaran prachakshate (kavyadarsh, Dandin)

alamkaras are born where word and meaning increase poetic beauty.

रमणीयता च लोकोत्तराल्हादजनक ज्ञान गोचरता। लोकोत्तरत्वं चाल्हादगतश्चमत्कारत्वापरर्यामोऽनुभव साक्षिको जाति विशेषः। कारणं च तदवच्छिनं भावनाविशेष पुनरनुन्धानात्मा। पुत्रस्तेजातः, धनं ते दास्यामि, इति वाक्यार्थधीजन्य स्याल्हादस्य न लोकोत्तरत्वम्। अतो न तस्मिनंवाक्ये काव्यत्व प्रसक्तिः। इत्थं च चमत्कारजनक भावनाविषयार्थ प्रतिपादक शब्दतम् यत्प्रतिपादितार्थ विषयक भावनात्वं चमत्कारजनकतावच्छेदकं तत्वम्। स्वविशिष्ट

जनतवाच्छेदकार्थ प्रतिपादकता संसर्गेणचमत्कारत्ववत्वमेव काव्यत्वमिति फलितम्। (रसगंगाधर, जगन्नाथ)
ramaniyata cha lokottarahladjanak gyan gocharta/ lokottartavam chaahladgatash chamatkartva paryayonubhavsakshiko jativisheshah karnam cha tadvachhinnam bhavanavishesh punranundhanatma/ putraste jatah dham te dasyami iti vakyarthadhijanasyahaladasya na lokotartvam ato na tasminvakaye kavyavatya prasaktih / itham cha chamtakarjanak bhama vishyartha pratipadaka sabdatam yat pratipaditartha vishyan bhavnatvam chamtkarjanakata vat chedakam tatvam / swivishshta jantvachhedkartha pratipadakta sansaryenchamat karatva tatvameva kavyatavamiti falitam. (Rasgangadhar, Jagannatha)
Poetry lies in producing consciousness of a pleasurable knowledge which is uncommon. Here ramniyata means giving uncommon delight, this is experienced by an uncommon and initiate reader/ audience, who is a special one. The reader is a special person because he comprehends the special meaning of the poet stated in an emotional language and recreates it in his soul. The delight that arises when statements like “a son is born to you” and “I will give you money” are made is not uncommon (lokottar). Therefore, in such statements uncommon pleasure is not derived. Poetry begins is delight and pleasurable experience which creates emotional intensity and at poetic wonder. A good poem suggests sense which is not stated but is denotated. Poetic wonder comes out of uncommon delight which is evidenced in uncommon contemplation and in using propriety which includes suggested sense.

व्याख्यागम्यं इदं काव्यं उत्सवः सुधियां अलम् (भट्टि)
vyakhyagmyam idam kavyam utsawah sudhiyam alam (Bhatti)
According to Bhatti poetry is a celebration for the learned readers and can be comprehended after interpretation.

वागार्थविव सम्पश्क्तौ वागर्थ प्रतिपत्तये।
जगतः पितरौ वन्दे पार्वती परमेश्वरौ। (रघुवंश, मंगलाचरण, कालिदास)
vagaratthaviv sampriktua vagartha pratipattaye jagatah pitarau vande parvati parmeshwarau. (raghuvamsh, *mangalacharan,* Kalidasa)

I bow my head before world's prime parents Parvati and Parameshwar who are integrated like word and meaning and for the knowledge of word and meaning.

Elsewhere, too, Kalidasa has expressed a similar view: "Poetry is a matching appreciation in agreement of the sound and the sense. This Two-in-One form of poetry is personified in the image of ardh-narisvara."

अज्ञात पाण्डित्य रहस्यमुद्रा ये काव्यमार्गे दधतेऽभिमानम्।
ते गारुडीयाननधीत्य मन्त्रान् हलाहला स्वादन मारभन्ते।। (मंखक)
Agyata panditya rahasya mudra ye kavya marge dadhate abhimanam te garudiya nandhitya mantran halā halā swadan marbhante (Mankhak)

न स शब्दो, न तद्वाच्यं न तच्छास्त्रं न सा कला।
जायते यत्र काव्यांड.ग महो भारः महान कवोः। (भामहः)
na sa śabdau, natadvachyam na tatshastram na sa kala/jayate yatra kavyanga mahobharah mahan kavoh (Bhamah)
The poet bears a great burden in making a word, a sentence, a book of poetry.

मा निषाद प्रतिष्ठां त्वमगमः शाश्वती समाः।
यत्क्रौंच मिथुना देवामवधोः काम मोहितम्। (रामायण, बाल्मीकि)
ma nishad pratistithamtvam agam: shashwati samah yat kronch mithunadevamavadhoh kam mohitam (ramayana Valmiki)
O boatman you will never be respected till eternity for killing the passionately love making pair of the kronch birds.

कविर्मनीषी परिभूः स्वयम्भूः। (वेद)
kavirmanishi paribhuh swayambhuh (Veda)
A poet like Brahaman (God) envelopes the whole world and is self-inspired.

संक्षेपाद वाक्यमिष्टार्थ व्यवच्छिन्नापदावती / काव्यं स्फुटदलंकार गुणदोषवर्जितम्। (अग्निपुराण)
शरीरम् तावदिष्टार्थ व्यवच्छिन्ना पदावली। (काव्यदर्श, दण्डी)

I bow my head before world's prime parents Parvati and Parameshwar who are integrated like word and meaning and for the knowledge of word and meaning.
Elsewhere, too, Kalidasa has expressed a similar view: "Poetry is a matching appreciation in agreement of the sound and the sense. This Two-in-One form of poetry is personified in the image of ardh-narisvara."

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संक्षेपाद वाक्यमिष्टार्थ व्यवच्छिन्नापदावली / काव्यं स्फुटदलंकार गुणदोषवर्जितम्। (अग्निपुराण)
शरीरम् तावदिष्टार्थ व्यवच्छिन्ना पदावली। (काव्यदर्श, दण्डी)

shariram tavadishtartha vyavachchinna padavali (kavyadarsha, Dandin)

ननुशब्दार्थौ काव्यम्। (काव्यालंकार, रूद्रट)
nanushabdarthau kavyam (kavyalamkar, Rudrat)
Verily poetry consists of word and meaning.

गुणालंकार रीति रसोपेत निर्दोषा लक्षणवती सरीति गुण भूषिताः। (बाणभट्ट)
gunalamkar riti rasopeta nirdoşa lakshnavati sariti gunabhuşita.
(Banabhatta)
Poetry is that which is full of gunas and alamkaras (figures of speech), style, emotions, and is without any blemish, full of merit, written a decorative language.

सालंकार रसानेक वशत्तिवाक् काव्य नामभाव। (चन्द्रलोक, जयदेव)
salamkar saranek vrittivak kavya namabhava (chandralok, Jaidev)
Poetry is ful! of alamkaras, money, emotions and styles.

शब्दार्थौ सहितौ काव्यं। (काव्यालंकार, भामह)
shabdarthau sahitau kavyam. (Kavyalamkar, Bhamah)
Poetry is full of word and meaning.

काव्यस्यात्मा ध्वनिः शब्दार्थं शरीरं तावत्का। (ध्वन्यालोक, आनन्दवर्धन)
kavyasyatma dhvanih shabdartham shariram tavatka (dhvanyalok, Anadvardhan)
Dhvani (connotation) is the soul of poetry word and meaning are its body.

रमणीयार्थ प्रतिपादकः शब्दः काव्यम्। (रसगंगाधर, पंडितराज जगन्नाथ)
ramniyartha pratipadakah shabdah kavyam. (rasgangdhar, Panditraj Jagannath)
Poetry consists in a language which produces beautiful meaning.

वाक्यं रसात्मकं काव्यम्। (साहित्यदर्पण, विश्वनाथ मिश्र)
vakyam rasatmakam kavyam (sahityadarpan, Vishwanath Mishara)
Poetry consists in a statement that induces emotion (rasa).

रसन्वितमलंकारैरलंकश्तं निर्दोषं गुणवत्कवेः कर्मकाव्यमित्याह। (कंठाभरण सरस्वती, आचार्य भोजदेव)

rasanvitamalamkareiralamkritam nirdosham gunavatkaveh karmakavyamityah (kanthabharan saraswati, Acharya Bhojdeva).

Poetry is made by a virtuous poet in a poetic language which is pregnant with emotions, alamkaras, decoration and without blemish. Such a work as have the above characteristics is called poetry.

रीतिरात्मा काव्यस्य। (काव्यालंकार सूत्रवशति, आचार्य वामन)

ritiratma kavyasya (kavyalankar sutravritih, Acharya Vaman)

Style is the soul of poetry.

Avantisundari, Rajshekhar's learned wife, holds that the nature of describable subjects in literature is not always definitive, the poet desribes it according to his perception and mood. The merits and demerits of poetry are the results of the poet's language.

Rajshekhar defends poetry against the following three objections:

असत्यार्थाभिधायित्वात्रोपदेष्टव्यं काव्यम् इत्येके। असदुपदेशकत्वात्तर्हिं नोपदेष्टव्यं काव्यम् इत्यपरे। "असभ्यार्थभिधायित्वा त्रोपदेष्टव्यं काव्यम्" इति न केचित्। न इति यायावरीयः। नासत्यं नाम किंचन काव्ये यस्तु स्तुत्येष्यर्थवादः। स न परं कविकर्मणि श्रुतौ च शास्त्रे च लोके च।। (राजशेखर)

asabhyartha bhidhayitvatro pade shtavyam kavyam ityeke / asadupadesha katwattarhi nopdeshtvyam kavyam itya pare / "asabhyarthabhidhaitwa nopdeshtavyam kavyam" iti na kechit na iti yayavariyah / na satyam nam kinchan na kavye yastu stutyeshyarthavadah / sa na param kavikarmani shrutau cha shastre cha loke cha (Rajshekhar)

There is nothing untrue or false in poetry. The praise of the describable person or object is not at all untrue. Moreover such descriptions are found not only in poetry but also in the Vedas, the scientific treatises and worldly affairs alike. (Rajshekhar)

अस्तु नामनिःसीमाऽर्थसार्थः। किन्तु रसवत एवं निबन्धो युक्तो न नीरसस्य इति आपराजितिः।

astunamnihsimartha sartha: kintu rasvat evam nibandhoyukto na nirasasya iti aparajitih

Aparajiti maintains that the subjects describable in poetry are limitless; still, whatever its subjects, a poetic composition must necessarily be charming; it should never be dull or repulsive. Rajshekhar agrees with him and says that a poem becomes beautiful not because of the ideas but because of poetic diction:

''आम्'' इति यायावरीयः। अस्ति च अनुभूयमानो रसस्य अनुगुणो विगुणश्यार्थः, काव्ये तु कविवचनानि रसयन्ति विरसयन्ति च नार्थाः। अन्वयव्यतिरेकाभ्यां च इदम् उपलभ्यते। कुकविर्विप्रलंभेऽपि रसक्तां निरस्यति अस्तु वस्तुषु मा वां भूत्कविवाचि रसः स्थितः।

aam iti yayavariyah / asti cha anubhuyamano rasasya anuguno vigunashyarthah kavyetu kavi vachnani rasyanti virasyanti cha narthah / anvayavyatirekabhyam cha idam upalabhyate / kukavi vipralambhepi rasaktam nirasyati / astu vastushu ma vam bhutkavivachi rasah sthitah.

However, Palyakirti disagrees with Rajshekhar. According to Palyakirti the beauty lies in the peculiarities of the disposition of the poet and not in the subject of the composition:

यथा तथा वाऽस्तुवस्तुनो रूपं वक्तश्प्रकशतिविशेषयन्ता तु रसवत्ता। तथा च यमर्थं रक्तः स्तौति तं विरक्तो विनिन्दति। मध्यस्थस्तु तत्रोदास्ते इति पाल्यकीर्तिः।

yatha tatha vastu vastuno rupam vaktri prakriti visheshayanta tu rasvatta / tatha cha yamartham raktah stautitam virakto vinindati / madhyasthastu tatro daste iti palyakirtih.

"If a poet is aesthetically disposed, his composition becomes aesthetically enjoyable. If however, he is temperamentally dry as a bone, his composition is also bound to be so".

रूपकादिरलंकारस्तथान्यैर्बहुधोदितः
न कान्तमपि निभूषं विभाति वनितामुखम् (काव्यालंकार, भामह)

rupkadiralamkarah tatha neirbahudhoditah na kantamapi nirbhusham vibhati vanita mukham. (kavyalankar, Bhamah)

Without alamkar a poem does not become attractive as the face of a woman remains unattractive without her ornaments.

Thus one finds that Indian aestheticians' discussion on the source of beauty in poetry revolves around the following four points: (i) the beauty lies in the describable subject (ii) it lies in poetic expression (iii) it is there in the temperament of the poet (iv) it is governed by the mood of the poet.

As is the confusion about the definition/nature of poetry so is the confusion about the nature of criticism and qualifications of a critics. Whether a poem should be simple enough to be understood by everyone or should be complex enough to require an exhaustive commentary to be understood has also been discussed by Indian scholars. For example, Bhatti opines:

व्याख्यागम्यं इदं काव्यं उत्सवः सुधियां अलम्।
vyakhyagamyam idam kavyam utsavah sudhiyam alam.

Bhamah on the other hand counters Bhatti's contention saying that a poetic composition is meant for everyone's enjoyment and if the poetic piece can be understood with an expository commentary only, the persons of ordinary intelligence will be deprived of the literary pleasures.

Whatsoever the definitions of poetry were formulated by early poeticians like Bhâmha, Dandin, Udbhata and Vamana, they had been crystallised in the works of Anandavardhan and Mammatta. The definition of Mamattabhatta had been challenged by Vishvanath Kavirraja and Panditraja Jagannatha. Jagannatha too critisises Mammata Bhatta's definition of Kavya in his Rasagangadhara but Nagesh Bhatta's – a grand disciple of Jagannatha upholds, Mammata's definition.

Anandvardhan rejects the principles of Riti (Style) saying that they were propogated by those who were unable to understand subtle concepts as that of dhavani:

In the ancient Indian tradition criticism was not considered a worth undertaking an activity as is clear from the following quote:

A puritan school of Indian theology advises to avoid literary discussion as it is likely to unclean literature. The *Agnipurana* ascertains that the study in pure literature may promise moral, commercial, sexual and divine progress; proficiency in all sorts of Arts assure love and fame in this and that life. On the other hand no literary work is avoidable at all. If the sound be the form of All-pervading Lord Vishnu; and a single word is well appropriated: how any kind of it may either be unclean or avoidable. Ritualists observe that Lord Hari (Vishnu) washes out all sorts of bad omens, even if He is recollected by bad souls. The aesthetic sense enlivens the entire poetic structure as the fire enkindles the whole body of a dry piece of wood. Poetry is virtually a self-exuberant happiness and the unveiled self-consciousness, that brightens an aesthete's heart with the pure attribute of Intelligence. Everybody is a realiser or a relisher there and there is no question of a teacher and a taught. The poetry with its body, composed of a sound a sense, is the only immortal thing in the mortal world."

Similarly in the West if one follows the dictum of Jesus Christ, (Judge not so that ye may not be judged, Mathew 7:1) perhaps there will not be any activity in the world because the doer/creator/ poet is the first judge of his/her own work. However, I shall not indulge in this debate further nor do to discuss the superiority of one over the other (i.e. criticism and poetry) but criticism can be described as Godly activity as God too judged His own creation ("God said it was good", Genesis 1:31). Therefore, one has to agree with R A Scott-James that "Criticism is as old as creation itself."

There is no universal answer to the vaxing issue of the characteristics of a critic as is apparent from the arguments of the Acharyas who propagated the six schools of Indian Aesthetics viz. Rasa, Dhavani, Alamkar, Riti, Vakroti and Auchitya. Similarly in the West broadly speaking we have Classical, Romantic and Neo-Classical schools of criticism which later on have given birth to individual critics. Nineteenth century onwards, almost after every ten years we have had a new approach to interpret a text, like Psychological Approach, Marxist Approach, Reader-Response Criticism, Archetypal Criticism, Formalistic School, Structuralist School, Deconstruction and the like.

Bharata has given the following seven parameters to judge of good (*loka kalyankari* doing good to people) poetry: sophisticated diction, absence of obscure words, easy to follow, full of cleverness, worthy of use in dance sequence, ability to arouse various feelings, ability of various combinations.

The above characteristics are aimed at a reader but do not discuss a reader directly. However, a literary creation is meant for a reader. Whether this reader can be anyone or has to have certain characteristics/qualifications. This question has largely remained undebated in English criticism but in Sanskrit poetics there is a great deal of discussion about the nature of a critic on a discriminating reader (*Pathak*). This issue is relevant here because this reader is the first critic of the work of art. Thus, the qualities of a reader become the qualities of a critic. Literature in Sanskrit tradition is meant only for a *Sahridaya Pathak* (a compassionate reader). Abhinav Gupta defines the term as: "those in where mirror of the mind, clarified by constant study of poetry, has sprung up as ability to establish a support with the matter being portrayed and who are physically capable of understanding the conveyed message of the heart, are *sahridayas* (compassionate readers)."

In the West also a lot of discussion over the problem as to who can be the judge of the poet has taken place. Whether to judge a poet's work is a poet's task alone. The answer is obviously 'No', though major practising critics have also been poets in their own right. Dryden, Coleridge, Lamb, Arnold and T.S. Eliot some of the names that immediately come to one's mind but we also have a very long list of major critics who were not creative writers. The works of A.C. Bradley, G. Wilson Knight, F.R. Leavis, I.A. Richards, Northop Frye, Raymond Williams, Derrida and Edward Said to mention just a few who have changed the course of English Literary Criticism fall in this category. There is an absence of such critical views/books in Sanskrit perhaps because, as has already been mentioned above of the prevalent puritan thinking. Various debates were also ensued by many critics and many of them changed their stances about a work/poet because of the debates. T.S. Eliot, for example, viewed Milton in altogether a different light after engaging himself in debate with F.R. Leavis. The examples of the poets listening to the voice of critics and accepting their criticism are not rare either. Ezra Pound's reducing T.S. Eliot's 'The Waste Land' to a considerable length is a case in point. On the other hand we also have ample examples where poets took offence to critics' remarks and opinions - - sometimes suffered silently (like Keats) and sometimes became volatile (like Dryden). But, I firmly hold that a work of healthy criticism helps the poet, the critic and the other readers as well and everyone enjoys it as it is no less creative than the creative work itself. It is in this sprit that all these pieces of criticism have been put together and are being presented at one place. Now let me dwell on the nature of critic/criticism and their tools in the West by way of a rapid survey.

Western classical critics like Aristotle, Horace and Longinus prescribed certain rules for composing the works of literature based on their own areas of experience. But one is not sure if it did any good to poetry or the poets as is also mentioned by Sir W. Temple: "… I do not know there was any great poet in Greece after the rules of that art laid down by Aristotle, nor in Rome after those by Horace, which yet none of our moderns pretend to have outdone." Neo-classical critic Dryden wants a critic to make a comparative study of the work to arrive at some judgement though his main objective was to advance a justification for his own work or to establish his own (or the English) superiority over the rivals. Thus, his criticism was not without any bias and prejudice. His contemporary Alexander Pope considers generosity to be an important characteristic of a critic: "The generous critic fanned the poet's fire,/ And taught the world with reason to admire". Matthew Arnold argues that only a person who has a sense for the best is suitable be a critic. Such a person will be in a position to make a comparative study and use touchstone method to judge a work of art. According to him a critic should be able to judge poetry for its substance and matter i.e. highest truth and highest seriousness as well as style and manner i. e. diction and movement. For him the best criticism is characterised by disinterestedness. D H Lawrence has dwelt on the nature of critic and criticism in great detail at various places. Here I quote a few lines from his 'Essay on Galsworthy': "A critic must be able to feel the impact of a work of art in all its complexity and force. To do so he must be a man of force and complexity himself, which few critics are. … He must have courage to admit what he feels. … A critic must be emotionally alive every fibre, intellectually capable and skilful in essential logic and then morally very honest. Then it seems to me a good critic should give his reader a few standard to go by." The New Critics under the leadership of I A Richards wanted to keep the text in the centre of their discussion as they emphasised an intrinsic and objective study of a particular text. T S Eliot, too, says that a critic should shun "his personal prejudices and cranks" and he should be able to make comparison and analysis. F R Leavis says "…the business of the literary critic is to attain a peculiar completeness of response and to observe a peculiarly strict relevance in developing his response into commentary. For another exponent of New Criticism, Cleanth Brooks, a critic should be able to reveal the "ironic complexity of the poem". While for Wimsatt a critic should be able to judge a poem without indulging in the "affective" or the "intentional" fallacies. Russian Formalists advise a discerning critic to look for "deformation" and "literariness" of a work while for Northrop Frye a critic should be able to look for archetypal and mythical patterns in a literary work. A Deconstructionist like Paul de Man expects a critic to reveal the logo-centric politics of a work. While Marxist critics look for base structures and superstructures in a work and try to identify the moors of a writer. The feminists have also patriarchical and matriarchical paradigms in their minds to study a particular text. Similarly a post-colonial critic is looking for colonial politics in a particular text. On the basis of the above discussion one can safely conclude that an illuminating critic should be well read, should be able to form opinions based on some principles and should be able to express them convincingly.

Indian soil has produced a plethora of important poets writing in English. Many of them were published by big (multinational) publishing houses like Oxford University Press, Clearing House, Rupa, Macmillan, Disha Books, Harper-Collins, Orient Longman and many others particularly in seventies, eighties and some in ninties. Many bigger ones like Penguin and Cambridge, to my knowledge, did not venture into publishing Indian Poetry in English. But unfortunately the takers have not been many unlike in fiction. Moreover, the media hype of huge royalties, big sales and prestigious awards was never the case with Indian Poetry especially Indian Poetry in English. And these factors are cited as the main reasons for the publishers' not accepting poetry enthusiastically yet the corpus of Indian Poetry in English has expanded year after year thanks to Writers' Workshop, United Writers', Green House, Home of Letters and many others. M. K. Naik and Shayamala A. Narayan express their anguish over "that huge crop of verse (to call it 'poetry' would be the mis-statement of the millennium) which seems to be growing all the time, like wild grass in the narrow field of Indian English literature." (*Indian English Literature 1980-*

2000: A Critical Survey, p. 183) But how to distinguish between the chaff and the grain is the precise problem. Should it be left to the hands of a few – raw/sceptical/hijackers/untrained only? The question justifies a book like this.

The anthology *From the Core Within* is yet another contribution that dispelled the doubt of a fragile future of poetry. The anthology not only got published but was also read widely in India as well as abroad. The anthology when read along with its reviews becomes more interesting and refreshing. The reactions on the anthology have been divided into two groups viz. the reviews proper and personal appraisals/ reactions conveyed to the poet in writing. The reviews have mostly been published elsewhere too. The same has been mentioned soon after the piece. In some cases where the review has appeared in more than one places but in differently edited forms, I have tried to restore the original version in consultation with the original manuscript of the review and the respective author.

This anthology will be of interest to the critics and the poets, the students and the teachers of Practical Criticism and Creative Writing. It will help them understand several subtle issues in creative writing besides helping them in understanding various matrices of publishing poetry and criticism.

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①

A professor cannot become a poet and a poet is usually not a professor. A poet is mostly born but not made, not even 'self-made'. He is of altogether different temperament and sensibility and has a special power to using images and symbols. His language is not literal; it is highly suggestive (i.e. *Kantasammith upadesh*). Prof. Sharma's poems are not from the core of his heart as he outspokenly admits in the title of his first collection of his poems. Some of the titles appear to be poetic but are not poems. At least 'these some' would have become had he given greater attention and care. His poetry imbibes all bad elements — colloquialism, advice, moral preaching, talk etc. Above all, what irks is his "universalised I" and the words of feeling and thought. Sharma in him is yet to die; the poet in him is yet to born.
I hope that he will flower into a poet in future. — **V. R. Badiger** (Dept. of English, Gulbarga University, Gulbarga, Karnataka) in ***The Quest***, XIV, 1(June 2000), pp. 59-60.

②

"Language is a form of organised stutter. Literally, you chop your sounds up into bits in order to talk. Now when you sing, you don't stutter, so singing is a way of stretching language into long harmonious patterns and cycles. What do you think of language in songs?" On being asked this question, John Lennon, the greatest legend of Rock Music, replied, "Language of song to me, apart from being pure vibrations is just like trying to describe a dream. And because we don't have telepathy, we try and describe the dream to each other what you know, what we believe to be inside each other. And the stuttering is right because we can't say it. No matter how we say it, it's never how you want to say it." The words like 'songs' and 'stutter' in this passage can very well be replaced by 'poem/ poetry' and 'pause' respectively and it will be equally applicable to Susheel Kumar Sharma's poetry. However, in his first poetry collection, *From the Core Within,* Susheel Kumar Sharma has been fairly successful in describing his dreams. For that matter any competent poet's foremost task is to combine the dual swords of the 'truthfulness of his emotions' and his 'felicity in handling the permutations of words' so as to bring across to the reader, an honest view-point of the way to which the poet's perception leads him (the reader). The above knack brews the perfect recipe for an effective poetic creation.

The poems of Susheel Kumar Sharma cover wide spectrums of inter and intra personality clashes that all of us undergo. They also make comments, which couple the feelings of angst and at times mock bewilderment over the way all of us go through the business of living. The following lines prove the point:

'Tell me were you
not wandering for naught?' (p. 4)

xxx xxx xxx

That emptiness
he could have seen and felt
even at home—
had he peeped into my heart. (p. 61)

The above quotations embody the most essential trait of the poet that he is a dreamer first and anything else later.

The sadness that emanates from his verses portrays the long yearning for some elusive dream and answers those questions which are unimportant yet so important. For the analysis of all emotions and corresponding circumstances, (with a rear view mirror advantage that only hindsight can provide), form an unbelievable step to transcend to a higher elevation that makes living and cherishing life much more worthy.

Susheel Kumar Sharma's poems do have the right pauses, exclamations and more importantly question marks at right places, which make their reading exude pleasure. To elaborate my point, I adduce a bit further and quote a few lines from 'But':

You cry for water
I have a tumbler full of water.
But who will quench my thirst
If I fall short of water? (p. 33)

Taking the amnesty of deconstruction, the above lines have a very symbolic and penetrating meaning. They attempt to underline the fact as how even behind the most noble of human intentions the egocentric grain of man's nature might side-track his energies from the same. For when a close friend or relation dies, the bereaved person is actually not crying for the lost one, but for his or her own security, love or any other emotional bridge that linked him or her to the departed soul.

Dr Sharma has been thoughtful enough of synergising his collection into a balanced amalgam of poems dealing with both human sentiments and relationships as well as with larger issues which try to pose piercing questions to the collective conscience and wisdom of the society. The following lines from the sub-collection of 'Gulf War Poems' highlight the point made above:

Your words: 'peace', 'shelter', 'love',
'friend', 'guardian', 'protection', 'tutelary'
have lost their meaning
and are empty
for they cannot fill
a hungry man's belly.
A belly needs bullets or a bread.
You cannot provide the latter.
To whom should I go for the first—
To the enemy or to the friend? (pp. 28-29)

The climax of the poem mirrors the stark nudity of man's claim of calling himself civilised. Even the following lines from the section VII of the poem in question focus on the horrid face of a war perpetuated in the name of peace:

By killing thousands of innocents
By arresting thousands of innocents
By letting the corpses rot in the open
By not giving bread to the hungry
By snatching water from the thirsty. ... (p. 30)

The lines smell of a feeling of intense angst against the so-called leaders or the rulers of the world who talk gung ho about 'strategic alliances' and 'promises for the Planet's blissful future' but fail to address the basic issues of poverty, hunger, war and health of the vast majority of mankind. These lines and other poems in the collection at large have a very sad halo, and because sadness is usually silent, the silence reflects the impotency of waking up of our conscience out of its forced and stubborn slumber. The poet seems to be aware of it. That is why the book closes with the poem titled 'A Hope' suggesting a way out ("I just want to worship/ The pagan in you for/ This is the only hope/ To survive ... this world...", p.72) to mankind to face the onslaughts of various kinds. Susheel Kumar Sharma promises the casting of a serious and a mature poet who should try to convert his pastime into a full-blown profession. Before ending, I strongly recommend ***From the Core Within*** to the readers of this article as 'a must'. Happy reading! — **Charan Kamal Bagga** (Executive in HCL, New Delhi) in *National Herald*, New Delhi, May 26, 2001.

③

When a poet's vision is clear his poetry becomes lucid and most sincere. This is what happens in the book *From the Core Within*, a collection of 50 rare enthralling poems, by Prof. Sharma. The very title signifies that the poems are by the Heart of a Heart and so are meant for any Heart. Spontaneity of expression is the most striking character of all poems. The direct moving simplicity of lines is praiseworthy indeed! The poems run like *'rolling stones'*. 'The Spineless', 'Progress', 'Welcome', 'Ways of the World', 'A Question', 'Life', 'This Civilisation', 'A Guest', 'Questions', 'Nature,' and 'Wonder' are some beautiful poems which establish Sharma as a brilliant poet of Super-simplicity. And the themes are catchy, thought provoking, and superb! It is well observed that most of the poems are subjective, but there is a positive touch of objectivity of universal appeal. Poetry for Sharma is not intellectualising life but emotionalising life. As a great lover of simplicity and peace the poet has paid a glorious tribute to peace with simplicity itself in the collection.

So what if he does not "shave regularly", or does not "polish ... shoes regularly", or "does not read Debonair". Let people say whatever they like. He is truly a Shakespearean 'witty fool' among the foolish wits. He alone knows well the truth of Truth! He has well perceived that Truth is no *darkness*, but *light*. And light is *vividity of simplicity*. It is the highest Truth for the poet. His life is simple, his faith is simple, and his everything is simple and straightforward! A praiseworthy personality indeed! However, the book, a most sincere attempt to keep a record of life — its varied encounters, is a marvellous contribution to world of poetry. The direct or plain style of the poems will certainly reach a heart solely, for which it is meant. The poems must live long — A Hope! — **Mandal Bijoy Beg** (Poet, Critic & Editor) in ***Green Lotus***, II, 1(January 2000), p. 51.

④

From the Core Within is the first venture of Susheel Kumar Sharma in the field of poetry. The book contains 50 long and short poems of the author. The poems in the collection can be divided into three major groups — the one drawn on fantasy like 'A Painting in Blood', 'A Reverie' and more; the ones related to his reading of some famous works like Khushwant Singh's *Delhi*, Jagmohan's *My Frozen Turbulence in Kashmir* and Nissim Ezekiel's 'Jewish Wedding in Bombay'. The creative reactions stand apart from any direct correspondence and breathe a life of their own in poems like 'When Nadir Shah Fell Upon Delhi', 'Parting' and 'To the Secular Indian Citizens'. And the ones visited by anxieties in poems like 'Motherly Affection', 'Progress', 'A Dream' and others. The poems are simple and written in a conversational style. They first raise questions and doubts and then set about seeking answers and solutions to them which forces shedding of some poetic elements at times. There is less waiting to let reactions settle down and emerge with imagery. The saying forces itself its say directly. It is a novel technique and requires more collections to mature. We can sure depend upon Susheel Kumar Sharma's enthusiasm. — **O. P. Bhatnagar** (Retired Professor of English, Amravati & a reputed Indian Poet in English) A - 478, Sarita Vihar, New Delhi-110 044.

⑤

Poetry, they say is 'emotion recollected in tranquillity'. Susheel

Kumar Sharma's poetry is a living testimony to it. He has the privilege on living in a calm, serene and unpolluted setting of Pantnagar in the foothills of Kumaon. From that distance he looks at the tempting horizon dotted with large conglomerations of Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta, Hyderabad, and leaps to touch, feel, and possess these ferocious flames. He feels repulsed at the first encounter itself. His sensitive heart reacts after realising that the heart-throbs of nation are peopled with cold, indifferent but calculating beings who do not see merits beyond their narrow walls. This pimplish aspect of growth of India becomes a cause of distress for the poet. Like a sensitive soul the poet is arrested by the inhumanity, cruelty, and self-centredness of man, be it in the Gulf, Jerusalem, Kashmir, and Nainital — centres of spiritual upliftment.

The poetry of Susheel Kumar Sharma is different because it locates virtue in what is generally perceived as the 'negative'. It is evidence of the maturity of thought from which springs a quite, gentle flow of delicate feeling and concern for the close and the distant. It is symptomatic of his self-confidence born upon existence of communal adherence.

Like all poets, Susheel has his areas and moments of obscurities too. A large number of poems like 'The Spineless', 'A Search for the Brains', 'A Painting in Blood', 'A Reverie', 'Motherly Affection', 'Progress', 'Parting', 'Impact', 'This Civilisation', 'The Meeting', 'A Guest', do testify to assertion that this poetry is indeed from the core within. Everyone who claims to be sensitive must read it. —-**Suresh Chandra** (Formerly Prof. & Head, Dept of English, R T M Nagpur University, Nagpur) in ***Critical Practice***, VII, 1(January 2000), p. 115 and in ***Canopy***, XVII, 39 & 40(July 2000), p. 33.

⑥

From the Core Within is the first anthology of Susheel Kumar Sharma's poems in English and contains fifty poems that are of great relevance to our times. These poems don't profess to be carrying the baggage of any fashionable ideology, but they do seem to be anti-intellectual, anti-commercialisation, anti-communalism in the interest of humanity. In 'Ways of the World', the poet out rightly refuses to carry any burden:

They want me to carry
The load of living-deads,
To give me the certificates –
Worth rubbish. (p. 45)

As the words spring straight from the core of the heart, they don't fail in making an instant mark over the mind and the imagination of the readers. The poet's sensitive 'I' gives an eyewitness account of the heart-wrenching personal travails of a poet, a teacher and a middle-class citizen. The poet's eyewitness account becomes an eye-opener for others as it gives an insight into the genesis of things, well-established beliefs, doctrines and workings of the system. The poet's encounter with rejections, failures, penury, apathy, opinionatedness and callousness of people leaves him "spineless" and his conscience consequently turns into a rebel and a reactionary. Though hard-pressed at times, he never fails to voice the right, the just, the ethical and the beautiful. He resists all constraints and breaks out with:

My conscience
Is like my
Blue parrot
Who does not sing
In a golden cage. (p. 1)

The poet is ostensibly at war against dogmatism, orthodoxy, communalism and terrorism. He castigates and reprimands the modern Babars, the Nadirshahs and the Aurangzebs who are responsible for the devastation of the human civilization. The poet rightfully exposes the vicious nexus of the 'elite', the 'privileged' and the intellectual. He also brings under question the hep society and the decadent culture of the metropolis. Poems like 'A Search for the Brains' and 'Treatment' resolutely disclose the petty politics of the publishing houses and the enterprise and the intrigue involved in the affairs of the literary world. He refuses to bow before the 'big names', which make 'big time' because of their situatedness in metropolitan cities and the so-called centres of learning. The poet's uneasiness and resentment against sham literary figures, which are demonstrative, poseurs and opportunities in the first place is not impertinent.

Sharma's poems stand true on the following observation of Graham Greene that "writing is a form of therapy". I think that through his anthology Susheel Kumar Sharma has tried to bear with failures, melancholia and the panic that is actually inherent in every human being and thus his poems fairly succeed in depicting the "common experience". The poet's observation is keen and his composed nature and level-headedness give a balanced perspective to his poems. Most of the poems are autobiographical in nature as the poet broods over certain touchy issues. He makes a powerful plea in favour of innocence, peace and friendliness that alone can restore human relationships. He ends up as being a misfit and an eccentric in the fast-growing materialistic world. He is not ready to shed his ways for 'The Ways of the World', as he states in the following lines of the poem of the same title:

I'm carrying dead load
Of my old parents, memories of
my childhood, dead values. (p. 44)

He is not asking for accolades and acclaims. Susheel's anthology freshens its readers, for he is not tricking readers by any abstruse philosophy but is telling them about his dreams and his vision to live happily. His poignant statements on the "progress" of not so much progressive nation is precisely accurate. His memories, his desires and his dreams persistently contend with each other and at the end of this appalling battle his identity asserts with all its long-cherished visions and unaccomplished ideals.

Susheel's poems don't voice experiences "so rare" rather they convey certain emotional and psychological truths. The poet's argumentative nature and his rational outlook are conspicuous throughout. He is hyper enthusiastic to bring a 'change' and is not at all satisfied with the present order of things. Though his belly has remained empty at times, the sky has always been starry or him and he has carefully clasped his dreams to his bosom. Poems like 'Conscience', 'Thou'. 'Wonder', 'How to Live', 'A Question' persistently speak about his doubts, and his anxiety about the state of affairs. Susheel Kumar Sharma knows the power of letters as well as his responsibility of a man of letters. Therefore, he strives hard to bring about a "change" in the mindset of people and also in the socio-political and cultural set-up of the nation. He has not succumbed to the lures of modern day luxuries, so-called high standards of living, intellectual fetishness and pretentiousness of the middle and the higher classes and has indubitably succeeded in being true to his own self. Hence, the significance of the following lines from the poem 'A Search for the Brains':

> Find your muse among ancient sages –
> They tell you
> *Soham.* (p. 4)

To sum up, *From the Core Within* is a remarkable collection of poems, where there is no difference between the language of prose and the language of poetry. William Wordsworth wanted to bridge the gap between the language of prose and that of poetry but could not do so. I personally find that Susheel has succeeded in many a poem of this volume in uniting the language of prose with that of poetry. I sincerely hope that he will produce more volumes of poetry in the coming future to enrich Indian Poetry in English.
— **Subha Dwivedi** (teaches English Language & Literature at Amity University, Noida) in ***Helicon Views***, IX, 1(2005), pp.70-73 and ***Readings***, III, 1(April 2005), pp.152-154.

⑦

The collection is a fascinating assortment of fifty free verse veritable cameos and idylls on a variety of themes — socio-economic, socio-politic, socio-ethical, socio-psychological, metaphysical, secular, religious, philosophical, national and international. It is a pot-pouri of sensations, emotions, feelings, notions, and ideas, poetically conceived and fancifully dressed. The poet being sincere to his individual self vis-à-vis social self has succeeded in conveying the feel of the poet in him to the *suhrad* and *shraddhalu* readers. Unquestionably, the poet has lived the experiences expressed (in the etymological sense of 'pressing out') personally, or in a few cases, as in 'Seven Poems on the Gulf War' and 'When Nadir Shah Fell Upon Delhi' empathetically. An in-depth study of the poems reveals that the writer is an angry hungry man, who has boldly made a public display of his sore bruises caused in his heart with the brutal behaviour at the hands of people, including snob scholars, editors and publishers. The poems evoke various *'rasas'*, *'karuna'* and *'vibhitsa'* predominating. 'Comely belles' are there but they have beaten retreat to the empty bellies and crying children. Some of the poems being personal, viz. 'The Spineless', 'Grandma' and a few others appear to be timely deliveries, giving 'Relief and 'A Hope' to the poet. In almost each poem, the reader, reading between the lines, faces the release of the gathering glum in a painfully agitated seething heart. Personal or impersonal, the poet is always alert and serious about his avocation.

The collection successfully reveals the author's psyche and an undercurrent of seriousness running through on the one hand, and on the other, as literature inevitably is, is a moving record of the social and cultural history. Some of these historical records are: "starved beggars and/ Healthy mendicants were blessing people" ('Chitrakoot', p. 70), "To get success/ LOVE is not necessary/ But HATRED is" ('How to Live', p.63), "...certificates.../worth rubbish" ('Ways of the World', p. 45), "I sit glued to my T. V." (the repetition of the line like a burthen of the song is highly effective in the poem, 'Relief', p. 35), "Where is peace these days ?" ('Seven Poems on the Gulf War-V', p. 27) etc. and those depicting the personality of the poet himself are "my boss is cruel — you know" ('But', p. 33), "For I am a robber, I robbed your virginity", ('Parting', p. 20), and "Whenever I asked you/ You blushed" (*Ibid*, p. 19), and the simile after simile used to characterise the poet's conscience in 'The Spineless'. Personal and impersonal, the poet in clear and simple diction communicates his meaning, and thus achieves the primary purpose of writing. And yet the simplicity is quite enticing. To be sure, some of the above quoted lines and phrases are mentally heard even when they are heard no more. The poet has meant and conveyed more than what the words literally mean. His artless artistry in cases is praiseworthy. The poems as the title — *From the Core Within* — reveals have sprouted from the inner layers of the writer's person. A question that comes to the readers is 'why has the poet termed the book 'a collection of verse' instead of poems?' The question becomes troublesome as in the poem VII of the 'Seven Poems on the Gulf War' he justifiably claims to be "a poet and not a dog/ That for an image shall pull the intestines/ Of an innocently crying child" (p. 30). The poet has questioned many Indian customs and ethical principles and old age superstitions rites and rituals. His questioning attitude is reflected in question marks galore in his poems; about half the number of the poems collected either begin or end with lines having a fretting question mark standing at the stops. The titles 'Is There A God around?' and 'How to Live?' have this punctuation mark in the 'Contents' though it is missing when they head the poems in the book. The poem 'A Question' rightly enough, has one mark of interrogation. Surprisingly, the question marks in 'This Civilisation' outnumber those in 'Questions'. As a matter of fact in 'This Civilisation' only one punctuation mark (if one were to ignore the hyphen in "half-naked", p. 56) – the mark of interrogation – has been used.

The author has made an effective use of various devices: repetition of words, phrases and lines, Janus-face single-word lines, question-mark at the end of the statement ("I was a slave of time or of life or of body?", 'Life', p. 53); full stop at the end of a interrogative sentence ("But how could I ... my heart", 'A Guest', p. 61); quizzical dots ("O bloody ...", 'Nainital-I', p. 49) and capital letters ("ME .../... / Moss", 'Fate', p. 18). At places in the following lines, for example, there is a telling use of imagery: "I observed monkeys/ Sleeping, eating, running, frowning" ('Chitrakoot', p. 70).

The use of similes (particularly in 'The Spineless', p.1), metaphors, paradoxes, euphemisms and marks of exclamations is noteworthy. The author is ironical, satirical, humorous and figurative and symbolical in accordance with his purpose. Symbolical expressions as "blue parrot" ('The Spineless', p.1), "virgin white" ('A Hymn',

p. 10) spread an elusive charm in the poems. Likewise, the use of the irreplaceable Hindi words in Roman – 'bindi', 'sindoor', 'khir', 'ghats', 'sahab', 'ji', 'kamandala' and so on gives a refreshing touch to all Hindi-knowing readers.

Misprints quite a common feature though they be of Indian publications, add a discordant note wherever they occur in particular and mar the beauty of a collection. The collection will definitely gain in power if the misprints are removed in the editions to follow. There is a jarring divergence between the titles of poems as they have appeared in the 'Contents' (see, Sl. No. 14, 22, 36, 37, 41 and 43) and heading in them in the book. Some mis-spelt words like 'throns', 'glore', and 'Etables' (p.70), 'strom' (p. 17) and 'descendants' (p.36) have stolen into the collection.

From the Core Within is a pioneering enterprise of a budding poet — an enterprise, which some enthusiasts must envy and some others make efforts to emulate. Surely there is a psycho-psychologist in the poet striving to seek cathartic relief from contemporary trauma causing social scenes and sights. The work gives enough peep into the author's thinkscape and holds a mirror to the plight of present day man and his world. The Collection is worth the reader's pains as it includes in its varied charms, valuables offering of insights to all sensitive and sensible humans. Poets-in-the-making will undoubtedly seek inspiration from it. — **H. C. Gupta** (Retired Professor and Head, Dept. of English, M.L.B. Autonomous P. G. College, Gwalior, M.P.) in ***Littcrit,*** XXVI, 1 & 2(June, December 2000), pp. 116-118, ***Scoria,*** 7(July 2001), p. 46 and in ***Poetcrit,*** XV, 1(January 2002), pp. 100-102.

⑧

Everyone is a hidden poet. But Susheel Kumar Sharma is no more one simply because he has brought his poetic creativity out into the open with his book titled *From the Core Within* (Creative Books). A few lines from the poem 'Treatment': *Let them not publish my poems/ Yet they will see their day/ As I will make them songs/ That my comrades will/ Use as clarion calls to raise a storm the sleeping sea.* (p. 17) Another refreshing voice in Indian English Poetry. — *The Hindustan Times, H T Magazine*, Sunday, July 30, 2000, p. 2.

⑨

Can the solution of the present
be present in the past?
Will some angel come to their help
To show them the way
To lead them to their goal? (p. 65)

It is an undeniable fact that the escalating advance of modern technology during the previous century has not only facilitated travel links and inter-communication between nations, but has effectively reduced this planet, in comparative terms, to little more than a global village. The extensive development of Mass - Media has in so many ways, changed our customs, living standards and sense of values almost irrevocably. Universally we have undergone changes, too, in matters appertaining to religion and morality. Furthermore, when faced with sudden widespread major catastrophes and diseases man has finally realised that it is indeed foolhardy to sit back and await some impending miracle that may never happen. He must attend promptly to World problems unassisted by Divine intervention; thus this earth has become more unified—not in tenets of religion, but in the common humanitarian measures that the people of the world must share. I well remember reading a large poster outside a church in a northern English city, some years ago. The message on the poster simply said: "God provides the food for the birds; He does not put it into their mouths".

Susheel Kumar Sharma, the author of this fascinating collection, *From the Core Within,* was Associate Professor of English at the University of Agriculture and Technology, Pantnagar, besides being a much published research writer and notable academic. His sensitively balanced work, *From the Core Within,* contains poems which are largely introspective in that they deal with his disillusionment with religion in general, and dictatorial authority in particular. He rails (and quite rightly so) against the hypocrisy of those who teach the attributes of Peace to the young and at the same time advocate and hasten unnecessary bloodshed and deliberate warfare:

In the school
I was taught the Song of Peace
And not the Song of War. (p. 23)

In his poem 'A Hymn', he examines the way that God would wish him to live his life, but implies that the shackles imposed by religion remove an individual's right to free-will. There is a quite anger, barely concealed, but briefly revealed with the inclusion of a particular word in line 3 (the word, 'snatched'):

God has made me blind.
God has not permitted me to hear.
God has snatched my voice.
But I do not have to lodge a
complaint anywhere. (p. 10)

It is important here to realise that these words are by no means a criticism of God, The Omnipotent, but rather of man-made rulings and teachings, which purport to speak in God's name. As a poet, Susheel is a free thinker. Therefore, he considers that his higher thoughts should be duly recorded without the tunnel-minded vision of religious restraint. So he addresses issues of humanitarian importance to us all. His poem, 'Welcome', clearly demonstrates this, as he proclaims that his abode is not given to either extreme of religious practice, but everyone will find a welcome there. This lovely poem is in three stanzas and concludes with a strong note of humane compassion concerning the hospitality he would readily extend to the deprived and less fortunate, within the place he calls home:

Be sure
It will provide
Water to thirsty
Tea to the exhausted
And food to the hungry, (p.34)

In his poem, 'Relief, he continues to express this heart felt sense of compassion, as he recollects his thoughts on observing a programme seen on T. V. which had dealt exclusively with those poor, unfortunate, crippled, starving and deformed. His conclusion to this poem uses the device of counter-expression, for on switching off the set, he remarks:

I felt relieved.
Now I could not see even myself
And could sleep. (p.35)

It is precisely in his consideration of this self-centred, entirely selfish attitude, lacking even the very seeds of compassion that makes his point; *for these by no means are the sentiments of the poet.* It will be clearly seen that he is, in fact drawing attention to the general indifference of the average T.V. viewer. Moreover, he is pointing the numbness of spirit occasioned by over indulgence in the constant spread of media coverage. I was deeply touched by the poet's heart-rending plea for the aged within our community. His poem 'Grandma' is a representation of *everyone's* loving grandmother, and it highlights a growing problem in countries where there is little state provision for those elderly persons who are no longer supported by their families:

Her eyes have turned white
And have water in them all the time
Crying for mercy to be shown
By the out going passengers at the
railway station. (p. 16)

Undoubtedly the section of this publication that will attract most attention is that group of poems under the collective title, 'Seven Poems on the Gulf War'. Here the innocence of the small child, the implicit trust of sea-birds in their natural habitat, and that closer love of the members of the family within the home setting are together balanced against the mindless, savage cruelty of merciless warfare.

In this brief review, I have mentioned but few of the inspired offerings within Susheel's fine collection; enough, I would suppose, to whet the appetite of any serious poetry-lover. For Susheel Kumar Sharma is one of that rare breed of intellectuals whose primary concern is love of his fellow man. If this poet should ever be considered a revolutionary, then let it be known throughout the literary world that his is the revolution of *PEACE.* — **Bernard M. Jackson** (Artist, poet & critic, Jesmond, New Castle Upon

Tyne, England), ***Poets International,*** XVIII, 1(January 2001), pp. 20-21.

⑩

Dr Susheel Kumar Sharma is one the young and enthusiastic poets of Indo-Anglian stream. He has to his credit some promising work in English literature. Fond of reading and writing, Susheel writes when there is an urge in him to write. It seems to me that he writes only when the Muse inspires him and his thoughts and emotions materialise themselves in flashes his poetry of moods.

In his poem 'The Spineless', the poet loves freedom — freedom from bondage and freedom of expression. He writes:

My conscience

Is like my
Blue parrot
Who does not sing
In a golden cage. (p.1)

Susheel is a poet of 'Human Decorum'. In this poem he puts a straight question to his readers, "why does a man stoop so low to earn his livelihood?" In one of his poems 'Dreams', he talks of the realities of life. He tries to realise his dreams, but utterly fails. At the end of his poem he comes to the conclusion that dreams are short-lived and they cannot become real.

In several of his poems Susheel talks like an idealist. He feels sorry for the present state of affairs. He asserts that if people follow the norms of ideal life, it can be saved from being shattered. In 'Relief' the poet writes that all unhappiness in life is due to multifacedness of man. This is true to a great extent. Susheel's poems are simple, rhythmical and deal with day-to-day experiences. By temperament he seems to be an idealist but does not tell us what he means by an ideal life and what its norms are. It is pleasure to go through the poetry of Susheel, as it does touch reader's heart and mind. — **Mularam Joshi**, (Creative Writer & Retd. Director, Institute of Correspondence Courses, Barkatullah University, Bhopal) in ***M. P. Chronicle, Sunday***

Chronicle, June 11, 2000, p. 3.

⑪

The deluge of free-market materialism and the computerised onslaught of technology on our 21st century civilisation have failed to submerge the poetic spark, and the ark of the muse is still afloat. This is amply proved by *From the Core Within*, a collection of short lyrical poems by Susheel Kumar Sharma. Unburdened by the weight of rhyme and rhythm and shorn of the clinched poetic verbiage, the poems are capable of creating ripples in the staid and matter- of - fact ethos of our times.

What at first glance appears to be an attempt to articulate the storm within that has traumatised the poet in his personal life and the world around him reveals, on a closer look, an undercurrent of nagging irony pricking and goading the man of today on his failure to become what he aspires to be, and the shattering of his cherished dreams, which finds an expression in poems like 'The Spineless', 'The Rejection of a Cordial Julep' and 'A Search for the Brains', etc.

The poet makes an attempt to come to grips with a world vitiated by anomalies and contradictions, hypocrisy and humbug, where principles and ideals have gone topsy-turvy, and the moral fabric has gone haywire, which a sensitive soul is unable to cope with. The sympathies of the poet are with the deprived and the marginalized as can be seen in 'A Reverie', 'Motherly Affection', 'Progress', 'Grandma' and 'Fate', but he finds himself helpless and defeated 'fluttering his wings in vain', in his desire to change this wicked world. The 'Seven Poems on the Gulf War' in a similar vein expresses shock and dismay at the senseless violence and suffering unleashed by futile wars and pyrrhic victories.

However, what relieves this doleful serenade is the glow and human warmth of sensual imagery and hedonistic delight interspersed throughout the collection particularly in poems like 'Parting', 'A Dream' etc. Such colourful delineation of the scene around and the smooth unlaboured flow of poetic expression lend a rare charm to these poems, and suffuse them with musical cadences and echoes from the works of the leading lights of English poetry with whom the poet has had a long aesthetic association as a student of English literature.

On the whole, this collection of poems has the freshness and gleam seen in well-lit earthen lamps floating down a holy river whose flickering flames create varying glimpses, according to the angle of vision and predilection of those who may go through these poems. — **S. D. Joshi** (Formerly Professor of English and Head, Dept. of Humanities & Social Sciences, C. B. S. & H., G B. Pant University of Agriculture & Technology, Pantnagar- 263 145) in ***Triveni***, LX, 4(October-December, 2000), pp. 56-57.

⑫

The art of writing in a simple style but packing it with profound truth of life comes to a very few practitioners of poetry. But Susheel Kumar Sharma has attained mastery in this art as is evident from the first collection of his poems *From the Core Within*. The poems here appear here to have come in print for the first time, unlike in many other such collections. Therefore one wonders on the maturity of thought and style in Dr Sharma's maiden attempt. Take for example, 'Motherly Affection', which in the first person narrative mode (most the poems in the collection have been written in this mode):

I was born
    crying on the outskirts
of a railway station.   (p. 12)

The abject poverty of the family, the society, and the nation has been depicted in a very subtle manner in the ensuing lines; soon the reader finds that the 'personal mother' becomes the 'mother nation' and a little later the 'mother earth':

My mother still
    drags me
to the heap of rubbish,
which I also increase,
—To find
some crumbs

to feed her
40 crore sons! (pp. 12-13)

So many themes like poverty, deprivation, hunger, environmental pollution, struggle to earn one's bread, ever increasing population of India and apathy of the younger generation towards the elders come into play simultaneously. The struggle goes on —- there is nothing good in store — no hope, no calm, no peace, but only the fear of death that lingers on: "Who knows the moment / I'll meet my mother's fate!" (Idem)

Susheel Kumar Sharma shows the struggle of humanity against the forces of nature, which do not let it be at peace. All the scientific progress does not augur a safe passage to human beings. Thus, it is not only the objects of nature like tigers and dinosaurs that face extinction but human race, too, will. At least, man is not in a winner's position. According to Dr Sharma, man does not enjoy a special status as is claimed in so many religious books, but he is simply an object of nature that evolved to attain the present status. In 'Progress' (p. 14) Dr Sharma shows that from the generation of one's great grand mother down to the present generation (a journey of about 150 years — roughly also the age of scientific advancements) nature has always come out with a new deadly weapon in the forms of 'black fever', 'tuberculosis' or 'cancer' to destroy human race. And every time man has found himself helpless and unprepared to face the calamity.

But, war among human beings is not a solution for any problem that the world is facing. Nor is it a means of establishing one's superiority over one another. Dr Sharma suggests that it is not natural for human beings to indulge in fighting and, therefore, if indulged in it cripples the psyche of human beings:

In the school

I had taken a vow to serve people

And not to kill the innocent.

Were my teachers wrong
In imparting me such education? (p. 23)

Wars, according to Dr Sharma, affect not only those who participate in them but also throw tantrums over a vast sphere of life and destroy lives at individual and social level:

Grandpa instead of taking a walk to
The seashore
Was confined to a damp corner of the
cellar and kept on muttering
The story of Abel and Cain. (p. 26)

The deep sensitivity Dr Sharma portrays in his poems reflects the depth of empathy he feels for humanity and the concerns he reflects for the changing value system around us. These poems are like shimmering pearls, being born from the core of the poet's conscientious heart. Any sensitive mind will be moved by the aura of truth they exude. Even a cursory glance at the collection will reveal the sharp quality of Dr Sharma's observation of life and the art of penning the hypocrisy of human lapses in a very subtle but touching ironic way. Poem after poem captivates the reader for the truth they reveal that touches a sensitive heart. The style, the content and the beauty of Sharma's poems are truly emulative and readers will certainly enjoy his poems. — **Dwarkanath H. Kabadi** (Poet and Freelance Journalist, Bangalore, Karnataka) in ***Indian Book Chronicle,*** XXV, 8(August 2000), p. 6

⑬

Poetry according to Prof. Shiv K. Kumar is the dramatization of ideas. Susheel Kumar Sharma knows the art of dramatization and has the simmering wounds in his heart to express in verse. 'The Spineless', 'A Painting in Blood', 'A Search for the Brains', 'Crucifixion' and some other poems bear testimony to it.

Dr Susheel Kumar Sharma is a perceptive critic with one critical book *The Theme of Temptation in Milton* to his credit and it has been received well in academic circles. *From the Core Within* is his maiden collection of 56 poems. In his poems he muses on almost all aspects of our life and gives full vent to his inner urge. Simplicity is the charm of his poetry and his poems seem to be written at ease, without much effort. His poems in general are formulaic, set on some tutored patterns that make it convenient for him to write a poem on any subject. But they, at the same time, impose limitation on his craft and his lines become predictable.

The same pattern is repeated in every stanza. An example of predictability is 'Progress'. The first stanza begins with "My great grand mother/ begged to save/ ..." (p.14) the second is "My grand mother/begged to save..." and the third "My mother...". This predictability, to my reasoned opinion, diffuses the riddle of the poem, the intensity and charm of the poem. But it regains its strength in the concluding lines that are sharp and pointed with a punch.

Another characteristic of Sharma's poems is that they are often built on a pattern of contrast and it is chiefly there that the strength of his poems lies. Take for example an outwardly descriptive poem 'Nainital-III'. He turns it into a logical discussion of the two parallel lines "East and West" that never meets:

He wanted to look at nature closely
And I wanted to teach him intensely
So we proceeded on together
relentlessly.
He drew my attention to the beauteous trees.
I pointed to the roots which made
the trees stand. ('Nainital-III', p. 51)

There is a dialectic approach in Susheel's poems. He tries to prove his conviction by putting forward logic as in 'Seven Poems on the Gulf War' or 'Is There a God Around'.

Dr Sharma has an uncanny feel for rhythm and music:

Forty heads —
Forty pots
going up and going down
some catching life
some craving for life. ('Goal', p. 47)

Dr Sharma's poetry is characterised by irony, wit, political undertone, social consciousness, rhetoric, simplicity and anaphora and he must be welcomed as a poet of great promise. (**C L Khatri** in ***Cyber Literature,*** VII & VIII, (June & December 2001), pp. 105-106.

⑭

The poems in *From the Core Within* actually emerge from the deepest recesses of the poet's heart. Many of them express the poet's agony while some others reveal his utter confusion. Apparently, Susheel has experienced life from close quarters and has seen myriad faces of life and reality. He is pained at the happenings in the world that is falling to pieces due to man's demeanour. The vacuum which has come up in our social and political system due to waning of older moral values is the poet's main concern in this first volume of poetry.

The prominent themes as observed in his poems have contemporary as well as universal appeal. In many of his poems anger and hypocrisy of an average 'Indian' are reflected. For example, in the poem 'To the Secular Indian Citizens' he expresses his anguish over the way people show their indifference towards the victims of religious bigotry and fanaticism:

Smile, if you wish
But afterwards.
Shrug your shoulders,
But afterwards.
Show your helplessness,
But afterwards.
Show your tolerance
Show your apathy
Show your unconcern
to reveal only your cowardice.... (p. 39)

The poet tries to remain rooted in the existing social system despite knowing that it promotes exploitation, degeneration and alienation. In the poem 'The Guest' he feels relieved having come across a guest of his, who too is not comfortable with this so called system. The feeling of loneliness within the poet makes the poem a wonderful piece which elaborates the theme when read 'in between the lines'. It is a good woven poem which talks of the emptiness 'within'.

One is reminded of W. H. Auden's 'The Unknown Citizen' after reading a poem like 'Believe It Or Not' where the definition of identity is being questioned by the poet. In 'This Civilization' Susheel shows how indifferent modern man has become to the suffering of fellow human beings – "naked child", "half-naked woman", "hungry child" and so on. The poet strongly indicts the modern civilization and modern ways of life as they turn him indifferent and insensitive to inequality, injustice, cruelty and suffering. He is not ashamed of seeing wrong things being done in his presence. There is a complete apathy and the only way he can justify his conduct is to proclaim unashamedly that he too is a part of the civilization and that it is the way of the world. The poet expresses his horror at the cruelty of people against others. The poem 'When Nadir Shah Fell Upon Delhi' is a strong criticism of people who try to crush the weak and innocent people just to make a show of his cruelty without realising that the simple and innocents who outnumber the cruel ones, if united, can be more powerful, more dangerous and more cruel, as often happens in any revolution:

Don't murder
    Innocence
    O Nadir!
    You may be Shah
    Of cruelty.
    But
It is
Innocence
That makes you a Shah.   (p. 8)

The poet seems to follow the Biblical tenets as he extends a general amnesty to all the perpetrators of crime, treason and cruelty ("Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing", Luke 23: 34) in the last line quoted above. The theme of retribution and justice to innocents and races has also been brought to the fore here for God takes the reins when individuals go berserk and their destroyer is produced from within the family. This virgin young victim girl knows that she is going to be deflowered by Nadir

Shah, the cruel invader, as she is helpless and no help is expected from the mortal powers that be. But the confidence that she displays in turning "your own seed/ against you" (p. 9) is the ray of hope for the entire humanity that has been crushed and humiliated at the hands of various dictators in different parts of the world at different times. The deliverer comes like a phoenix, sometimes in the form of Krishna or Prahalad and at others in the form of Jesus or Lincoln. However, the poet confines himself only to Moguls (Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb are considered to be deliverers as they arrested their respective fathers and put them in jail for their "misdeeds") perhaps because the poem is a sort spontaneous response to Khuswant Singh's *Delhi*.

Helplessness in the wake of mighty materialistic blind rat race, is the theme profoundly elaborated in the poem 'Is There A God Around'. The protagonist realises that the mirage of materials has cheated him for sixty years for pursuing particular goals like obtaining various objects of materialistic comforts and the realisation dawns upon him that is not meant to pursue such petty objects, goals and things. He does not take any steps to save his son from falling into the same trap but simply waits and watches like the killer lover in Browning's 'Porphyria's Lover'. Either he realises his own limitations against the mighty forces of advertisements and corporate world or he wants to slog over the issue so that the realisation dawns upon his son on its own or he is providing a space to his son to pursue his own goals or he is waiting for the messiah. That he compares his passivity to that of God proves that he has firm faith in God's doings.

The poems in the collection really find expression from Sharma's "core within". The innermost thing, conscience, is never let to die and keeps reminding the personae of ultimate unison with 'Him'. In the poem 'Conscience' he seems to underline this very truth where he says:

... I'll
fly away
to them

who are waiting
for me.... (p. 41)

The poem 'The Spineless' is about a modern man who is spineless because he has no moorings and keeps shifting his position according to his convenience. The modern man's conscience is either so lifeless or so flexible that it loses its substance. The role of conscience is most felt at the moments of crises. If those moments are not felt or the conscience does not stir in those moments, it is almost like having no conscience. The images—'maid servant', 'naughty son', 'healthy cat' and 'blue parrot' are from day to day experience of any modern individual. Even the reference to Babar evokes the political upheaval of 1990's in our country. In the poem 'The Rejection of a Cordial Julep', the poet does not want to celebrate his success or bemoan his defeat rather like a *karmayogi* he would like to press on with his journey to reach his goal without being tempted by any baits whatsoever.

The poem 'A Search for the Brains' talks about the hypocrisy of the so-called modern intellectuals. On the authority of ancient sages he suggests that the real knowledge is 'one oneself' and therefore wandering here and there in search of 'gurus' and wisdom outside is a meaningless search:

'Find your muse among ancient sages –
they tell you
'Soham'
'Tell me were you
Not wandering for naught?' (p. 4)

The pack of seven poems on the Gulf War reflects on the chaos, bloodshed, destruction and devastation, screams and tears all around. At times the poet questions the very education system which does not teach the 'tricks of war', 'cheating' and 'kill the innocent':

Were my teachers wrong
In imparting me such education?
Perhaps, they were.
Therefore, their lessons

Could not be used
And I and my country
Lost the War (pp. 23 – 24)

The poet wants to know the source this barbarity. The persona is shattered to the extent that he is unable to cope up with stress and is unable to return to normalcy. The constant 'martial music', noise of tanks, armoured vans and need of gas masks turns all three generations viz. those of grand parents, parents and children, schizophrenic. Various layers of meaning of the word 'peace' are uncovered by the poet. He says that peace is that which:

... does not bring death...
'In peace one can buy bread from the market'.
'People, in peace, do not cry,
'People, in peace, are not desperate and timid',
... 'In peace it is all calm and quiet.... (p. 27)

Another prominent theme in the anthology is 'agony'. The theme finds expression in many a poem like 'A Painting in Blood', where the poet is trying to show the tragedy of whatever is prized as beautiful and precious it takes him to the path of ruin. Similarly, in another poem 'A Reverie', it is an agonised cry of a man who commits crimes for his personal gains, tries to find a justification but also feels sorry for his having lost his innocence. The poet expresses his mental and moral strength in raising his voice against 'system'. The poem 'A Hymn' is a wonderful example. Sharma raises his voice against vulgarity and carnal pleasures in the poem 'Human Decorum':

The Cuban dancers
On my telescreen...
As they present a sight
Of Khajuraho sculpture...
Why does a man stoop so low
to earn his livelihood? (p. 11)

Susheel has talked about the miserable plight of the millions of people, in the poem 'Motherly Affection', who starve, grow up in penury and are compelled to find crumbs from the heaps of rubbish:

My mother still

drags me
to the heap of rubbish,
which I also increase,
to find
some crumbs
to feed her
40 crore sons! (p. 13)

Susheel is also pained that despite the progress in the civilization, medical science and technology, man has not been able to control diseases and people have been dying and there is no hope even now. The title of the poem 'Progress' which reflects this pain therefore is ironic. The tradition of prayer continues and perhaps will continue because death simply reappears in a different form:

... Now my wife is keeping the
family tradition
by begging
to save her son's life
of cancer.
How can she succeed
When three generations
have failed? (p.14)

In this anthology a reader will encounter wide ranging themes from 'modern ways of life', 'general poverty', 'misery of the common people', 'secularism', 'cruelty', 'consciousness', 'loneliness' to 'materialism' and so on and so forth. Reading this anthology is a refreshing experience — simple words that conceal profound thoughts. Though there are also moments when the poet is caught in dilemmas that he finds difficult to resolve but the poet's sincerity is unquestioned and his commitment to human welfare remains steadfast. The uniqueness of the poet remains in universalising an individual issue/ experience and individualising a universal issue/ experience. — **Sanjeev Kumar** (The editor of this anthology and Head, Department of English at B R Ambedkar College, University of Delhi, Delhi.)

⑮

About the community of the teachers of English in India it may well be said, "Of the making of verses there is no end." Sometimes these 'poems' appear to be a little more than prose arbitrarily cut into lines of varied length, which if restored into original prose, seems to read better. But a small number of these collections of verse do not easily yield to such 'plastic surgery'. There is some real poetic inspiration in them where the poet has felt his feelings and thought himself, in which, as in the book under review, the poems arise 'from the core within'. Some random facets of modern life touch his heart and father his cerebration, making him aware of the values obliterated and erased by the remorseless wheels of heartless civilisation. Many of Sharma's poems arise from the fount of pity and anger transmuted into unsentimental reflection and an implied reassertion of right values. The first three poems appear to define, perhaps unintentedly, the basics of the poet's approach —a conscience going on a journey of observation and setting for 'brains', purposeful reasoning, just 'wandering for naught'. The poem that follows, 'A Painting in Blood', depicts the poet's encounter with mankind, with his hands gory, guilty and self-destructive. He portrays the suffering of the mankind as his own, who is both the sufferer and by his tolerance, amounting to acquiescence, a cause of the suffering. He goes on with his survey of the scene of mankind—the roofless sleeping on platforms and dreaming horrible dreams, a clerk reminiscing of his mother picking crumbs from between railway lines, generations of Indians 'progressing' in the moods of their deaths from the old fatal diseases to the modern ones, a hungry beggar dreaming of a comfortable life, the sufferers of the Gulf War, the travails of the Kashmiri Pandits encountering a pathetic philosophy of 'tolerance' and so on. The distorted faces on T.V. present a modern world in miniature. The touchingly simple poem 'Ways of the World' ironically depicts the two value-systems of the past and present generations:

They say I'm abnormal
for

I pay enough to the rickshaw puller
I pay enough to a vegetable vendor
I pay attention to my students
I spend enough to purchase books.
They say
I am carrying dead load
Of my old parents, memories of
my childhood, dead values. (p. 44)

Such a 'civilisation' deserves a conflagration symbolised by the fire-crackers to bring on a new order. For a solution the poet goes on his 'Quest for a Chitrkoot' and an allegory of the growing youth with an unexpected resilience:

The mother thought that,
Its son/or was it a daughter? —
Was struck by the pollution or the bacteria.
It cried over its vulnerability and infirmity:
The flower was ready to multiply itself
How come the mother was oblivious of the fact! (Ibid)

This firm optimism in the future of mankind is a fitting conclusion to the poet's quest, though perhaps the means of achieving such a welcome stage — a pagan-like love of nature — needs to be transcended into an exploration and assertion of our ancient faith in the oneness of man, nature and God and in the salvation of man.

There are a number of poems on various other subjects, which can be said to fill the picture of human pursuits. But by and large the book is suffused with love and pity for mankind expressed both directly and allegorically:

He drew my attention to the beauteous trees
I pointed to the roots, which made
the tree stand.
He showed me a mile long queue of ants
I pointed to the grains that they
Were carrying to their homes . . .
He showed me the chirping birds

I interpreted:
'Live in peace, live in harmony'. (Nainital-III, p. 51)

It is the poet's sincerity and depth of emotion combined with a restrained use of imagery and over-all deceptive but penetrating simplicity of discourse, which draws the attention of a sensitive reader and lifts the book from out of the commonplace. —**O. P. Mathur** (Retired Professor & Head, Dept. of English, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi) in ***Points of View,*** VII, 1(Summer 2000), pp. 118 -119.

⑯

[From the Core Within] is a delightful and fascinating collection covering a wide diversity of subjects and ideas. Based firmly in the Indian continent we glimpse problems and adversities common to all mankind but viewed in a very unique style. The poems comment on subjects such as Government, the homeless, Mother-love, family and philosophic question such as conscience, God, Life...

I embraced this life
When it was smiling, sweet and friendly—
When it was spreading its scent
Like *Harsingars* in early November.
Everyone was nursing it
In one way and another.... ('Life', p. 53)

In the centre of the collection is a powerful group of seven poems on the Gulf War:

In the school
I was taught the Song of Peace
And not the Song of War.

… …

In the school
I was taught to save a man
And not to kill him.

… …

Were my teachers wrong
In imparting me such [an] education? ('Seven Poems
on the Gulf War', p. 23)

Most of the poetry is "free", so if you must have your poetry served up with regular rhythm and rhyme this is not for you. Yet I would recommend even the most die-hards of traditionalism to dip into the pages of this modest little publication. It opens a window into a very different world. — **John S. Mercer** (Co Antrim, Northern Ireland) in ***Titiksha,*** I, 1(June 2002), p.124.

⑰

My conscience
Is like my
Maid servant
Who never bathes.

My conscience
Is like my
Naughty son
Who never obeys. ('The Spineless', p.1)

The above extract is an example of the exquisite poetry created by Mr. Susheel Kumar Sharma. His poetic collection entitled *From the Core Within* is a collage of poetic emotions — sometimes happy and mesmerises the reader with their variety and depth. The imagery and the pictorial quality of the poems supplement the richness of emotions and infuse life into them. I am certain every lover of poetry would desire to read *From the Core Within* and have no hesitation in recommending it for publication by Minerva Imprint.

It has been very rewarding to encounter the writing of Susheel Kumar Sharma. When Minerva Press opened its New Delhi Branch, it was precisely in the hope of attracting this kind of work. – **Mark Sykes in Editorial evaluation,** Minerva Press, New Delhi, *et al.*

⑱

Sometimes one is distressed at the way Indians write poetry, have it published and yet have no takers. For though a good deal of such poetry (rather, cut pieces of prosaic statements) is chaff, there are also undeniable moments of good poetry:

My conscience
Is like my
Family god
Who can be mutilated
By any Babar. ('The Spineless', p. 1)

An indictment that can lead us searching for our spines we lost ages ago is this Continent of Circe. Susheel Kumar Sharma has more of this shuddery inescape in *From the Core Within.* 'A Search for the Brains' (why has the definite article been used here?) fries Khushwant Singh, Nissim Ezekiel, Shiv K. Kumar and P. Lal in the hilarious *ghee* of frustration. The Ezekiel style turns up in 'Dedication of a Transformer' and the laughing gas gets released in 'The Guest' and 'Treatment'. It is certainly a good resolution to brush away slips the editors and announce:

Let them not publish my poems
Yet they will see their day
As I will make them songs
That my comrades will
Use as clarion calls
To raise a strom [sic]
In the sleeping sea. ('Treatment', p. 17)

Well, is 'strom' a misprint for 'storm' or the seething anger of a modern poet sizzling with righteous anger? After all, one can visualise a Picaresque Venus rising out this sea since this human form is only a compact mass of fungus hyphae.

Hilarity gives way to sombre resonances as he takes the life around him (the three poems on Nainital, for instance) where the mind has been troubled by environmental degradation and insensitized to blood, killing and war. 'Seven Poems on the Gulf War' presents poetry as pictures of the youth who cannot write a letter easily anymore:

But words start metamorphosizing when I recollect
soldiers with guns in their hands

tanks ready to crush human beings
souls trying to leave the bodies.
The letter turns red. ('Seven Poems on the Gulf War III', p. 25)

Despite the aching sadness of the messages in *From the Core Within,* the volume is a pleasure to handle because of excellent production values. A warm welcome to Dr Sharma from the insiders of Indo-Anglia. — **Prema Nandkumar** (A well known critic based at Tiruchirapalli, Tamil Nadu) in ***Indian Book Chronicle,*** XXV, 8(August 2000), p.7.

⑲

What a dark explosion from an Indian Professor of English! Dr Sharma's doctoral dissertation was apparently about the theme of temptation in Milton. Sharma's temptations are different. For instance, a temptation to pass uncomplimentary judgements on contemporary Professors of English. Ezekiel who hijacks poetry to Bombay, Shiv K. Kumar who pours out drinks and P. Lal "Who abandons those whom he selects." All these (and Khushwant Singh thrown into the bargain) "are not brain producers/ but brain devourers" (p. 4).

Though Dr Sharma wants to abandon these modern poets and get back to the ancient sages, his poetry is singularly devoid of their presence. *Vhibatasa* is the reigning mood of *From the Core Within* — robbing corpses, a generational progress of mortal sickness and the mantra of Black Mass: "To get success/ LOVE is not necessary / But HATRED is", p. 63) The seven poems on the Gulf War come off well despite Dr Sharma's temptation to cut lines just when there is a natural flow of rhythm.

Though a slender volume, there is a natural variety here including an Ezekiel style poem on Indian English. The best prose-poem is certainly 'Thou' that helps the reader to come to terms with himself while reading modern poetry:

Plato confused me.
So did Socrates.
Sick of Nietzsche
I come to the shore
With Krishna

To be drowned in eternity.
Hare Rama! Hare Krishna!
Hare Rama! Hare Krishna! ('Thou', p. 57)

— **Prema Nandkumar** (A well known critic based at Tiruchirapalli, Tamil Nadu) in ***The Journal of Indian Writing in English***, XXIX, 1(January 2001), pp. 58-59.

⑳

Susheel Kumar Sharma's *From the Core Within* begins with a tautology: is there a "core" which "outside"? Trying very hard to convey a sense of anguish at separation, age and disappointing relationships Sharma communicated only some adolescent worry. What does one say to a poem like 'Parting'* (my apologies for quoting the whole poem):

Do you remember
When you called me 'Honey' first ?
you will say 'No' —
I know your reply.
But, I also know your heart.
You remember it very well.
It was exactly
Ten years and ten seconds ago.
It was in the garden,
Behind the temple,
Near the fountain,
Right under the sodium-lamp.
I shall no more be with you
To watch you put a *bindi*
Or putting *sindoor* in the parting
Of your hair
Or changing your ear tops
Or colouring your lips.
Why you did all this —
I knew but
Whenever I asked you,
You blushed.

I want to part
With all your memories —
My only treasure,
Which none can steal —
But with a heavy heart
For I am a robber.
I robbed your virginity. (pp. 19-20)

I refuse to say more, and leave it to you to judge Sharma's poetry.

— **Promod K Nayar** in ' "The Persistence of Memory": New Poetry', ***Chandrabhaga*** (3/2001), pp. 66-67. [* The following note also appears with an asterisk mark in the title of the poem in the collection: "On reading Nissim Ezekiel's 'Jewish Wedding in Bombay'" A reader has therefore to be very careful while judging such a piece. – Editor]

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This book of fifty poems contains poems genuinely coming from the core of the poet's heart. The themes of the poems in the collection are wide and varied. They are personal and public. In the category one we may put poems like 'Fate', 'A Question' and 'Fear/Joy'. The poems like 'Reality', 'Charm' and 'The Spineless' are under the second category. Imagery in Sharma's poems is vivid and is taken from common experience one has around oneself, though at times the poet seems to be Eliotic in the use of metaphors. For instance, the first poem in the collection 'The Spineless'.

He finds affinity between his conscience and an unbathing maidservant, a naughty disobeying son, a cat that turns pale at the sight of a dog, a parrot mute in the golden cage. These comparisons remind one of T. S. Eliot who in his 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' compares evening to 'a patient etherised upon a table'. Sharma's metaphors may be called living metaphors. The dance of the Cuban dancers in the poem 'Human Decorum' reminds one of the typist and the clerk in T. S. Eliot's 'The Waste Land'. 'Seven Poems on the Gulf War' asks the reader's to ponder seriously over humanity and brotherhood. This is one of the most moving poems I have come across on the subject of war. In the first poem on the Gulf War the birds in unrest symbolise the disturbed world itself. In the second poem on the Gulf War the sensitive poet depicts humanity being crushed under the threat of war because what the people were taught seems to be at variance with the reality they face. The third poem on the subject, deals with a soldier who cannot write to his mother and sister because every time he sits to write he sees blood instead of ink. The poem consists of and depicts a terrifying and crude picture of the War. The fourth poem in the series gives the most dismal picture of the post-war scenario where a child uses gas mask instead of enjoying chocolates and a mother screams at the dead body instead of singing lullaby to make the child sleep. In the fifth one, the child has become neurotic for he does not know what peace is like as he has seen only war and war-related scenes. The father tries hard to explain the concept of peace to such a child but is afraid of child's innocent question: "Where is peace these days?" (p. 27) and the child may take his father either to be a liar or feeding him on simply Utopian concepts. In the sixth poem on the subject the poet hints at the economic necessity of a war in the lines: "A belly needs / bullets or bread?" (p. 28) In the seventh poem of the 'Gulf War' the conscientious poet wants to live in peace and shuns all sorts of disorder and chaos. 'Chitrakoot' and 'Nainital' don't have much to offer, as they are ordinary descriptive poems. 'The Guest', 'Nature', and 'Fear/ Joy' are the few poems written with pure heart and lines in them seem to be coming out spontaneously. 'A Hymn' reminds us of John Milton's sonnet 'On His Blindness' and M. K. Gandhi's dictums: 'Don't look at evil', 'don't indulge in evil', 'don't utter evil'. However, the poem exhibits the poet's absolute faith in God. 'Motherly Affection' reminds one of Hardy's 'To an Unborn Pauper Child'. 'Progress' shows the common destiny of a man and the poet's pessimistic attitude. The title of the poem is ironical. The poem 'Treatment' creates a repulsive emotion. In it the poet seems to believe in 'tit for tat' maxim. 'Welcome' has been written under the influence of Kabir's lines: "Lord bless me with things that could be enough to welcome a guest and to run my own livelihood properly'. Another poem in the collection 'Relief', shows the hypocrisy of so-called post-modern people who dissemble to look happy and pleasant.

Susheel Kumar Sharma's another quality as a poet is his completeness of sense that does not end with one line but proceeds for two, three and sometimes four lines. For example, the following lines from the poem 'A Guest' will illustrate my point:

He liked to walk leisurely
On the path that ran through fields,
Beyond the village bounds —
where it led to a nighty forest:
Silent — all to himself. (p. 60)

We sometimes have the echoes of T. S. Eliot and Thomas Hardy in Sharma's poems but their presentation makes them typical of Sharma's. Sharma undoubtedly is at his best in this maiden collection of poems. Reading these poems will really compel the readers to think about various issues besides entertaining them. Some poems in the collection like 'To the Secular Indian Citizen', 'Life' and 'Goal' are didactic in nature and therefore will not be liked by the readers.

The cover page of the book in light blue colour is attractive. The price is quite reasonable and will propel the prospective readers to buy it. Though the printing is nice and accurate it has one misprint in the form of 'throns' (p. 70) instead of 'thorns'. The sleek collection is readable and one will enjoy reading it immensely.— **Brijesh Kumar Pandey** teaches at Lucknow (Address for correspondence: 11-1-Beli Avenue, Allahabad. Pin 211002) in ***Readings***, II, 1 & 2(April – October 2004), pp. 145 – 147.

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Susheel Kumar Sharma's collection of verse *From the Core Within* is absorbing and very straightforward. The poet amalgamates myriad themes and forms, heterogeneous elements, and diverse feelings and emotions to create a vivid mental landscape in the reader's mind. What strikes me poignantly in these poems is the feeling of loss and emptiness — a feeling of being alone among thousands; a feeling of being an automaton in a drab, monotonous and routine life; or simply a feeling of charting out a new way by deviating from others. Almost in all the poems there is an implicit attempt to create an alternative or an urge to defy the accepted norms in social structures. The poet mantles different roles and dons different masks depending on the context of the poem. He is a keen observer, a critic and a caricaturist.

In 'A Search for the Brains' the poet employs a conversational tone to parody the small talk of the people. By adding different pieces of conversation together, he creates a colourful collage. The criterion is to search good brains in different cities like Delhi, Bombay, and Kolkata and so on. But what is the yardstick to judge the brains? What have these so-called good brains done for the development of this country? Why don't we acknowledge that we are living in a fool's paradise? However, by employing a sceptical mode, the poet exposes the conceited politicians of Delhi, the big but shattered dreams in Bombay, the big-mouthed politicians of Kolkata, and the religious but baseless beliefs in the twin cities.

In a similar parodic vein, 'The Rejection of a Cordial Julep' portrays the poet in an ambiguous state. He is in a situation of doubt — whether to sing his songs of success or to be a mute listener to other people's songs? Whether to sleep passively or to set out on a journey? The last two lines of the poem ("Let me also sleep/But, to set out on a journey", p.2) are impregnated with layers and layers of meaning. Quite unusually the poet wants to sleep so that he can set out on a new journey. Here, the poet mixes the binaries together — sleep and wakefulness, activity and passivity, mobility and stasis — all these oppositions are blended together to create an effect.

'Dedication of a Transformer' portrays an ironic gratitude to the minister Upadhyayaji, who provides the village with electricity. The backward village can move on the path of progress now; but with every boon comes a bane. The poet shows that electricity is dangerous and can kill people; hence, the adverse effect of electricity should also be accepted. The poet, in a very realistic tone, weighs the pros and cons of a dicey situation. In the poem the poet employs a hybrid language by mixing the idioms of Hindi and English. The poem 'Thou' valorises the Indian myths, customs, and beliefs by rejecting the ideas of Nietzsche, Socrates, and Plato. We simply cannot graft some foreign ideas in indigenous soil. We have to create our own vocabulary, idiom, and history in order to carve out an identity of our own. But the poet fails to provide a common ground of intersection between these worlds. In many poems, especially in the 'Nainital' sequence we visualize a rift between the Eastern and the Western worlds which the poet doesn't aim to bridge. The question of identity is realistically and prosaically handled in 'Is There a God Around?' In our day to day life, we are busy with superficial and trivial things without realizing it. The poet gives a cross section of the globalised and mechanized society and shows how human beings are relegated to the backstage in the war between machines and robots. Money has become an important and sole keyword to gain recognition and prestige in society.

The poet expresses his thought so vividly that he goes to the length of delineating the minutest details. Most of the times the poet is asking some ironical questions or making some sweeping statements. Every poem instigates us to search our soul or question our preconceived notions on truth, virtue and other accepted social norms. Like the poet Ramanujan, Sharma evokes a very familiar mother figure and the terms and conditions of ordinary life in the poem 'Motherly Affection'. A poverty-ridden corrupted India is exposed to the ultimate in this poem. In *'Grandma'* a carefree state of childhood is recreated and we visualize an old and ailing woman who cooks, sings for the poet and takes care of him. In the poem there is a to and fro movement in terms of time shifts. The poet blends the elements of both the past and the present to create a continuous progression. In 'Progress' the poet shows how three generations are connected by a similar motif of death. He questions how we can ever think that India is progressing when thousands of people are dying every day out of incurable diseases. Nothing is progressing or moving forward because everything is stagnant and static in our country; yes, diseases are changing names from black fever to cancer.

In the collection most of the poems are in the first person. We can trace an autobiographical vein here; but we cannot deduce whether the "I" signifies the poet or a fictive persona. The mythological and religious metaphors are juxtaposed against the petty and materialistic pursuits of our present civilization. The poet moves to the roots our culture to redefine and reformulate the present. The historical past is narrated within the framework of the present scenario; and thus the poet creates his own history — a bundle of subjective perceptions and perspectives. 'Chitrakoot' is my personal favourite. Chitrakoot symbolizes an eternal quest. But unlike the mythological character Ram who spent the best part of his youth at Chitrakoot, the poet fails to find this place of bliss and joy. Though the poet is moving here and there, now and then in search of his Chitrakoot, the destination constantly eludes him. Chitrakoot is deferred as it slips away every time the poet tries to grab it. Later on the poet realizes that his Chitrakoot can be found within — in his mental landscape. One can easily discern the echoes of Kabir's lines: *"kasturi kundal base mrig dhunde ban mahi, eise ghat ghat ram hain dunia dekhe nahi"*(The source of the musk is the naval of the deer which is so oblivious of it and therefore keeps on searching for it elsewhere. Similarly the place of God is in everyone's heart but one does not look for Him at the right place properly.)

What strikes me on the first hand is the poet's stance. Very adroitly the poet leaves the puzzles, knots, inconsistencies, ambiguities, and questions for the readers. This opens a poem to multiple interpretations and diverse reception. Susheel Kumar Sharma's versatility lies in his selection of themes and subject matter. The range consists of simple topics like railways, flowers, places to sophisticated observations like burden of civilization, problems and predicaments of our country, the fatal blows of death and so on. It is a pleasure to read these poems because every reading is a new revelation. — **Namrata Pathak**, Research Scholar, CIEFL, Shillong.

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The title of the present volume of poems suggests that the poet has something very personal and intimate to share with the readers. He does that with high sense of precision. A real poet, who tries to transmit the reader to a higher platform, yet remains most down

- to - earth. In the first poem 'The Spineless' he tries to sketch his own conscience. He chooses the images from the day-to-day life. He appears to be a responsible poet who establishes an essential link between the day-today life and the spiritual life as well:

My conscience
Is like my
Healthy cat
Who turns pale
At the sight of a dog. (p. 1)

Dr Sharma's sensibility as a poet is worth observing. Nothing escapes his attention. He is a poet not only of 'self' and its analysis but also of everything around us. In 'Impact' he breathes life to the portrayal of the aftermath of flood. But what is central is the 'forlorn' baby. What he means and really matters a lot are the way millions of babies all over the world are orphaned. He is aggrieved over the indifferent attitude of modern people towards these babies. One finds the intensity of his feelings when he sings:

Water receded
Went down even the bathing places.
Water unto water
Or
Dust unto dust
But
The baby is forlorn
    And the world goes on. (p. 36)

Dr Sharma's present volume of poetry not only shows his deep feelings, his high sense of observation and skill of portrayal but also his deep rooting in Indian way of living, self-analysis and his high consciousness of the symbolic device. A reading of the anthology makes one spiritually active and aware of the growth of the self. – **Pradip Kumar Patra** (Reader & Head, Dept. of English, Gauhati University, Kokrajhar Campus, Kokrajhar, Assam) in ***Indian Book Chronicle,*** XXVIII, 4(April 2003), p. 14.

(24)

Susheel Kumar Sharma is a name I am familiar with through reading individual poems in Indian magazines and I am glad to see his poems in one collection. The poems in *From the Core Within* seem to resist being held and dissected by a critical eye. I open the book and read 'A Catalyst':

I came here
on the beach
searching for solace, rest and peace.
I wanted to forget everything
but the rambling waves
darkening clouds and roaring winds. (p.54)

That's it—the grist of the book "searching for solace, rest and peace", words sliding away from one another and coming back. The poems in this collection weave in and out of the everyday of reveries, dreams, and family, to civilisation: the conscience, social ills, and war. The titles of the poems are often intriguing: 'The Spineless', 'The Rejection of a Cordial Julep', 'When Nadir Shah Fell Upon Delhi', and 'Crucifixion'. Listen to rhythms of these lines from 'A Hope':

If we are the creatures of God
Or, the objects of nature—
I don't care. (p. 72)

And here again, where history enters the brutality of the mind, in 'Seven Poems on the Gulf War':

The white birds
Sitting on the seashore
Have lost their colour
In their effort
To swim across the sea.
They bear the brunt
Of heavy oily waves
And look like the
Pieces of a letter
That has been torn and thrown into water
For bringing the message of death. (p. 22)

But there is also a more meditative and romantic side to this poet. The book as a whole feels transitional, in a flux, precariously balanced or caught between dark and light, between the urbane and the visionary.

The poems are clearly set in the places Susheel Kumar Sharma has lived and in them he tells us a great deal about himself and his relationships. This is mostly appropriate because they are largely meditations inspired by surroundings, which trigger lyrical or narrative adventures or sometimes just pithy lyrics as in 'Wonder':

Like a kite
I was flying in the
Open sky.
I was dancing with joy
And was happy to see my height.
I was at the top,
Over every head. (p. 69)

How we all know that feeling of being stretched to the limit, looking down on everything and everybody. Luckily life's force doesn't rule our lives entirely and he writes:

Smile, if you wish
but afterwards.
Shrug your shoulders,
but afterwards.
Show your helplessness,
but afterwards... (p. 39)

Thus reiterating a tendency to dwell on the control we have over what happens to us. Susheel Kumar Sharma is not overwhelmed by the idea of inertia and most of his poems are hopeful if still recognising grief and pain where we may be "drowned in eternity". Occasionally one suspects he's feeding the soul, enjoying the potent gift of language, and stating the suffering of the world. But he manages to hang back and entertain us with the poems that are often crowded with ideas. This makes for more cerebral poems, which have to be teased out to make their messages clear.

There is a good balance in the work of a variety of forms and a mixture of approaches. He knows how to tug at one's heartstrings. There are poems about love, loss, and life. At its best, the poetry is sharply focused and uncompromising. It affirms the riches of the world that love and a sense of wonder can yield. — **Patricia Prime** (Auckland, New Zealand) in ***The Vedic Path***, LVIII, 6(2000 - 2001), pp. 239-240, ***Titiksha,*** I, 1(June 2002), pp. 125-126.

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With a little modification Whorf's hypothesis about language can be extended to the poet's language also as per his perception. A poet sees things that attract him and then gives expression to his feelings in a way he feels best to communicate. The prime requisite for appreciation of poetry is the ability to look at things from the poet's eye with *sahridaya.*

From the Core Within is a collection of fifty poems on a variety of subjects, familiar and near at hand. This has to be said since it is becoming fashionable to talk about winter on Stockholm or the beauty of the Seine without so much as getting up from the armchair. The very first one 'The Spineless' describing the poet's conscience rivets the reader's attention to the poet's thought but with its simplicity of expression. Obfuscation and obscurantism had their heyday even in Indian-English poetry but, thanks to whiffs of fresh breeze, simplicity has come back to be the watchword for our new poets.

Some may feel that the poems are wordy but then no new poet does learn or perfect his entire craft overnight. The "I" of the poems is convincing and honest. The poem 'Relief' (p. 35) is about pictures on TV, which bring no hope, no joy. The flowing screen that follows the switched off gadget in the dark where the poet could not see even himself, enables him to go to sleep.

It is very difficult to miss the points the poet wants to make in poem after poem. There is some kind of sadness, anguish, pain, and even despair. For one who thinks and also feels, poetry comes in handy as an instrument of self-expression. True there is more of sadness in the poems but then there is irony that gives some relief too. There are low notes on the higher levels as seen in the poem

'Dedication of a Transformer' (p. 58), the ubiquitous sham and hypocrisy cannot but make a poet melancholy and beat his wings in a sort of warning as in the poem 'The Meeting' (p. 59): "Save yourself—the bacteria will / soon eat you up". Basic Indian ethos is reflected in 'Welcome' (p.34). A house is *griha* and a *grihast* is one who keeps his doors open for the needy and helpless.

The poems with their simplicity and directness make the reader mull over the chasm between the ideal and actuality, between what we know we should do and what we do not do.

For a first collection the book convinces the reader that here is a promise of a worthy poet emerging. The way may be long but surely it is right. — **V. V. B. Rama Rao** (Retired ELT Specialist, Creative Writer and Translator, New Delhi, ***The Scoria,*** II, 6(December 2000), pp. 44-45.

26

From the Core Within is the first collection of poems by the young and the promising poet, Dr Sharma, who is already a reputed scholar and critic in English. Though numerous collections of verses are being turned out from the publishers' workshops throughout the country, the present one is a book with a difference as it seems to be an earnest endeavour at the qualitative improvement of Indian English Poetry which has already acquired a place of respectability. The opening poem 'The Spineless' shows the creative maturity of the writer in universalising the psychological predicament of the typical modern man whose everyday life is covered by cowardice, rather coarse in texture. These are the days when man kills his conscience mostly for selfish ends or lets it perish or die a natural death. Changing colours of mind determine the colour of one's conscience.

'A Search for the Brains' is at once humorous and intellectual, realistic and satirical, social and prophetic. People in the nation's capital, should not think that it is the centre of all the intellectuals, political leaders may be there and the Government may function from the capital but political power need not necessarily be there. Indian English poetry is mostly dominated by the Bombay group of poets, strictly speaking versifiers, lead by Nissim Ezekiel, and

as such Dr Sharma is right in saying
How can a brain accept
Ezekiel's hijacking
Poetry to Bombay? (p. 3)

The lines are indeed prophetic as the year 1999 ended with heinous act of the hijacking of Indian Airlines air-craft with 160 passengers and the crew members by the terrorists supporting a particular Muslim fanatic. An unhappy end of the second millennium! It is true, for a long time with monopoly of press; journalism, and media, Bombay writers dominated the field with the blessings of Ezekiel. Now this myth of their monopoly is exploded and we are fortunate enough to hear the potential voices emerging from all parts of this vast country. One such new and powerful voice is that of Susheel Kumar Sharma.

'A Painting in Blood' is an artistic poem revealing the split personality of the modern man, the complexity of whose nature is revealed by the multiple roles, both overt and covert, he plays reminding the immortal lines of Shakespeare: 'One may smile and smile and still be a villain.' The next poem 'When Nadir Shah Fell Upon Delhi' is a remarkable piece, blending the historical perspective and humanistic outlook.

Almost all the poems in this collection can broadly be divided into various heads: social, political, humanistic, personal and spiritual. While poems such as 'Motherly Affection', 'Dream', 'Relief, 'Impact', 'Nainital Poems', 'Reality', 'Fear/Joy' and 'Nature' reveal the poet's social-awareness, poems such as 'Is There a God Around', 'Ways of the World', 'How to Live', 'Fate', 'Wonder', 'Chitrakoot', and 'Treatment' expose the unkindness and unsympathetic nature that has become an ingrained part of the social fabric of modern life. While his spiritual awareness is expressed in such poems as 'A Hymn', 'A Question', 'Life', 'Thou' and 'Whispers', the humanistic spirit of the poet overflows in poems such as 'When Nadir Shah Fell Upon Delhi', 'Human Decorum', 'Seven Poems on the Gulf War', 'Crucifixion', 'Conscience', 'Goal', 'This Civilisation', 'Survival' and 'A Hope' which happens to be the last poem in this collection.

Though *From the Core Within* is the first volume by Dr Sharma, the poems reveal the creative maturity, poetic imagination and keen perception of the writer. Moreover the remarkable feature of the collection is that thematic range is wide and varied and deals with not only the socio-political-cultural matrix of the society but the much needed humanistic and existential concerns of the predicament of the modern life.—**T. V. Reddy** (National Fellow, U.G.C. and Principal, Government College, Puttoor, A. P.) in ***Poetcrit,*** XIII, 2(July 2000), pp. 101-102.

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From the Core Within is the debut collection of the poems by a budding poet Susheel Kumar Sharma, who is an eminent scholar in English at the University of Allahabad, a premier University of India. This collection has fifty poems in all in free verse. I would like to analyse some of the individual poems and show the main points in them for the benefit the readers and prospective buyers of the book.

The first poem 'The Spineless' is about the poet's conscience. The poet's conscience is told to be dirty or full of evil thoughts; it is disobedient, as it does not do what it is told to do. It is also afraid of dangers ahead and is cowardly as it can't fight against injustice, exploitation etc. Still the poet's conscience loves freedom. The poet's conscience is the representative of the conscience of the modern man belonging to 20th / 21st century. This poem reveals that man is opportunist by nature. In the poem 'A Painting in Blood' the poet says that the committing of one mistake leads a man to the committing another larger one and then another larger one. The process seems to be endless and in this way the man ends up as a criminal. However, the poet believes that the criminal also harms himself by inflicting some injury to himself. This poem is based on the saying "If you hold the sword in your hand, you will be beheaded by the sword only", which has been a favourite theme of many contemporary poets. The poem 'A Hymn' reveals the poet's faith in Gandhian philosophy of the three monkeys. One of the three monkeys of Gandhiji hears no evil, another sees no evil and the third speaks no evil. According to the poet if one is deaf, blind or dumb, one is not able to hear the beautiful sounds, see the beautiful sights or speak the beautiful words either. So one has reason enough to lodge a complaint against God. The poem 'The Civilization' suggests that the world is facing acute problems like injustice, exploitation, poverty etc. The poet feels helpless and says that we are the products of the civilisation of the present day and we must not be ashamed of or worried about the present plight because injustice, exploitation etc. are parts of the civilisation. In the poem 'Questions', the poet has said that there exist both good and evil in the world and he hopes there should exist only goodness and the evil should not be there at all in the world.

It seems that no collection of poems is possible without a poem or some poems having the hazards of war. There exist some poems on the theme in this collection too. The poems are given a common title 'Seven Poems on the Gulf War'. Here the poet says that both civilians and soldiers die in a war. A war also causes environmental hazards. The peace of mind of the mankind is shattered if a war takes place. The poet also hopes that the poets should play an important role to make the world a war free one.

In 'A Hope' the poet suggests that the world is getting destroyed in the hands of the believers of different religions. The poet does not believe in one or the other of the regimes. He wants to be a pagan but the meaning of 'pagan' by the poet is different than the dictionary meaning of the word. According to he poet a 'pagan' is s/he who believes in humanism. The poet suggests that the world will be a better place to live in when people belonging to different religions will be free from their religious narrow mindedness. The sole aim of the poet in this poem is to urge the people to be free from limitations of their faiths and to believe in humanism, which is not one of these regions but the essence of all these religions.

Generally speaking, the poems of Susheel Kumar Sharma are marked for the reference of history, Christianity and repetition of patterns of lines and stanzas. A pattern of contrast is often found in the poems. The humanistic approach is the best-marked feature in Sharma's poems. Finally I would like to say that Susheel Kumar Sharma who is now a budding poet would bloom to be a great poet with both beauty and aroma in the near future. I along with fellow readers would be waiting for the arrival of some more collections from his pen. —**Antaryami Sahu** (teaches English in M. G. Degree College, Bhukta, Barhgarh, Orissa).

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The poet has played various notes of satire, pathos and other emotions in the gamut of poetical expression. He seizes upon some striking situations of his life and poeticises it in a touching manner. Speaking the hard truth is a characteristic of many of his poems and this lends them beauty of a very high order. A number of his poems appeal to us with their picturesqueness.

'A Hymn' beautifully expresses the poet's appreciation of contentment with the situation in which God places us. There is a tinge of pathos in the delineation of a blind, deaf and mute person through autobiographical method. He goes a step ahead of Milton's sonnet 'On His Blindness' in the expression of his feeling of contentment with not only blindness but with deafness and muteness too. 'Human Decorum' satirises the modern tendency to stoop to the lowest levels of indecency. The Cuban dancers are picturesquely described. The poet peeps into the past of India in the poem 'When Nadir Shah Fell Upon Delhi'. He brings out with illustrations from history how cruelty does not pay. 'Progress' is a convincing plea for the old traditions. 'Treatment' is a cry against the ill treatment of a poet by the publishers. 'Fate' is a touching narration of how the poet has suffered the blows and buffets of misfortune but there is a point whence he cannot go down and where he will change from "a rolling stone"(p. 18) gathering no moss into one gathering it. In the poem 'A Dream', the poet, with the apt and striking simile of the sand in the Thar Desert, brings out the elusiveness of his dream from which he returns with a great shock, to his miserable
plight. The use of the concrete image such as "empty belly"(p. 21) to illustrate the abstract idea of poverty reveals the poet's artistic skill.

'Seven Poems on the Gulf War' have a place of their own in the collection. They reveal the poet's immense power of visualisation and his rich imagination in unfolding bright novel ideas. The miseries of war and their contrast with the comforts of peace are delineated vividly in these poems. The poem 'But', picturesquely sums up the 'buts' intervening between our capacity to help others and our inability to do so. The literal and metaphorical meanings running through the poem 'Welcome' provide rich food for contemplation and afford delight. The house in this poem stands for both — the poet's calm personality and welcoming attitude on the one hand and his house itself on the other. In the poem 'Relief', the fruitless chase of happiness in materialistic pleasures and the poet's genuine happiness after getting rid of them are picturesquely presented. Symbolism is used to great advantage in 'Impact'. All creatures, floating in the same direction, symbolise all the people, great or small or rich or poor, floating in the same direction towards death on the flooded river of life — flooded because life, like a flood, is full of sound and fury. The forlorn beauty stands for the helpless individual who is left alone by society to bear his misery. The abstract phenomenon of conscience speaking to us in the silence of loneliness and losing its voice in the actively sensual fetters of the body is vividly brought out through the concrete image in the poem 'Conscience'.

The painful contrast between prosperity and poverty and between the jungle of trees is brought out strikingly in 'Nainital-I', which also highlights the cruelty of the rich lost in enjoyment. "The blood from his head/ made a garland for the deity" (p. 49) — the lines ironically reveal the suffering caused by blind belief. 'Nainital-II' illustrates how the poor maintain themselves despite poverty and how honestly they work to earn their living. The unsophisticated nature of Nainital, enjoying nature for its own sake, is contrasted in delightfully simple language with a man, trained in modern analytical approach, in 'Nainital-III'.

"Reality is a pointed satire on the hypocrisy of the modern age." No less pointed is the satire on the hypocrisy of these times in

'This Civilisation'. 'Dedication of a Transformer' keeps us bubbling with laughter with the "half-English" spoken by the introducer of Upadhayayaji. The poem, 'Questions', presents the queries, which agitate the modern hair splitting argumentative mind.

The collection reveals Susheel Kumar Sharma as a promising poet.

— **Maha Nand Sharma** (an Internationally acclaimed poet for his masterly use of Miltonic blank verse in several of his collections and a retired Reader in English, Institute of Advanced Studies, Meerut University, Meerut)

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Human compassion is the keynote in this collection of verse *From the Core Within by* Susheel Kumar Sharma. In this respect he is in contact with the prime source of poetic inspiration that moved the first poet, Valmiki, as well as Homer. In most of his poems, Sharma depicts the pathos and tragedy of Indian life with courage without succumbing to sentimentality. He does not flinch from the presence of evil and criminal tendencies all around and finds himself as a human implicated in them:

I lately started
to rob corpses
of their valuables — an easy gain.
... ...
But I no more
have that dream. (p. 7)

The dream of "an ethereal sky/ studded with bright stars" (p.7) has ceased to appear and in this experience, a terrible beauty is born. He finds good and evil hopelessly mixed and observes his own murderous hands turning against him ('A Painting in Blood'). The poet's sympathy goes with the flower (symbolically speaking) crushed by the cruel feet of Nadir Shah; a powerful mood of pathos is created; at the same time the final victory of innocence is eloquently asserted:

The power
of positive
and the negative
electrodes

put together. (p. 9)

Cruelty does not pay in the long run: a kind of nemesis is bound to follow.

Moving, rather heart-rending pictures of poverty and misery are presented in some poems, such as 'Motherly Affection', 'Relief', and 'This Civilisation'. 'The Seven Poems on the Gulf War' successfully bring out the reversal of ideals and the irreparable loss caused by the war to innocent people:

Can you
return me my brother
or my son?
They had not gone
to participate in a war.... (p. 28)

There are a few other interesting poems on the academic politics and self-advertising going on in this country in which humour, irony and satire are intermixed:

Some are bleating
Of their success
Some about others' success. (p. 2)

There is an amusing dialogue in 'A Search for the Brains' which highlights the hostility among different groups of writers; perhaps the poet's voice is to be located in: " 'They are not brain producers / but brain devourers' " (p. 4).

We have a good number of poems of a subjective origin: they embody powerful expressions of the poet's own experiences, thoughts, and dilemmas. Some of them are of confessional nature. In *From the Core Within,* pathos does not lead to pessimism. There are strong undertones of hope, struggle, and belief in certain values — there is sufficient support for the human spirit in the modern scenario of the loss of innocence.

There is a fine awareness of artistic form throughout the book: each poem is carefully constructed in terms of rhythm, diction, and syntax. The rhythm is not dependent on patterns of beats only: it operates on a much wider scale and includes phrase, meaning patterns, and repetition. — **R. S. Sharma** (Formerly Professor & Head, Dept. of English, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi) *in* ***National Herald,*** (New Delhi), March 10, 2001 and in ***The Vedic Path,*** LVII, 5(September 2000), pp. 168-170.

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It is difficult to pen down a creative work and it is all the more difficult to write one in verse. But the young budding poet, Susheel Kumar Sharma, has done this beautifully in his first poetical work *From the Core Within.* By touching on so many contemporary subjects in a very easy language, he has shown his mastery in the art of painting the society in its vivid and real form.

In his very first poem, 'The Spineless' (p. 1) Susheel Kumar Sharma has very intelligently, though mildly, commented on the barbaric traits of the Mugals. The poem narrates the sensitive, pensive and dejected mood of the poet. In 'To the Secular Indian Citizens', p. 39) the poet criticises the pseudo secularism which has become the hallmark of Indian secularism. The poet is deeply anguished at the miserable condition of the Kashmiri Hindus (Pandits) in their own motherland. In 'A Search for the Brains', (p. 3) half-read intellectuals are the target of the poet's attack. The poet sarcastically brings to the fore the working of bureaucracy and the academics,—"government run by fools"(p. 3). His sharp, biting pen is very much in evidence in 'A Painting in Blood' (p. 5), 'A Reverie' (p. 7) and in some other poems where corruption of our highflying 'system' has sharply been attacked. But, he is different in, 'When Nadir Shah Fell Upon Delhi' (p. 8) where the Mogul rulers are very aptly chosen as the symbol of cruelty. The poet seems to be convinced that it is people's power, which is supreme, and despots are bound to meet a sad end.

In 'A Hymn' (p. 10) unquestionable faith in the ways of God has been reposed as "He is great and wants my welfare" (p.10). Immoral ways of 'man' to earn his livelihood are very strongly disapproved in 'Human Decorum' (p. 11). In 'Progress' (p. 14) the poet is dejected and sees no future for the masses as "three generations have [already] failed" in improving their lot. Family responsibilities and duties are also the subjects in a number of his poems. Some of them like 'Motherly Affection', (p. 12), and 'Grandma' (p. 15) are sad in tone. " OILS, LOVE, CARE, STORIES, UNIFORMS, FOODSTUFFS" (p. 16) are some of the symbols depicting love and affection.

The range of subjects covered by the poet is very vast. Much of what the poet says is sheer common sense that expresses his love and concern for the fellow beings. Such ideas have been beautifully penned in, 'Seven Poems on the Gulf War' (pp. 22-30). The poet has truly mastered the art of invoking different moods in one go.

The poem 'Crucifixion' (p.31) is quite moving, where the poet very painfully tells the readers about the sad lot of the 'Great Man' and the 'Merit', where it will be a burden to hold the flock together, when no great man is around. In 'To the Secular Indian Citizens' (p. 39) the poet again mocks at the fraud being practised in the name of secularism, because of which not only lakhs of Razdans and Rainas but also Premis have been passing their days in hellish conditions. Due to such suffering of the innocents and the nationalists, the young poet questions 'Is There a God Around?' (p. 42).

The plight of the dedicated and honest teachers has been lamented in 'Ways of the World' (p. 44). It is a very common feature in this country where teachers are given a very shabby treatment but the babus and dealers are given the best of life and world. In the three 'Nainital' poems (pp. 48-51) natural beauty has been discussed in a very comfortable and light manner. Illustrations are the biggest plus of the poet. They are by far the best, and make the identification of lake, jungle, Naina Temple, boatmen etc. much easier and vivid. Quite often the poet displays an inclination for the withdrawal from the real world, "Waiting for my Mukti" ('Life', p. 53), but surprisingly, there is a facade of involvement in the activities of life through revolutionary means, where "we only need to carry 'firecrackers' to "bring a new order"('Reality' p. 55). The poet is on slippery ground when he talks about Hindu religion in 'Chitrakoot' (p. 70).

In his poetry Susheel Kumar Sharma creates an impression of being a lonely
ascetic brooding over the corrupt world around him and finding himself a misfit in it.

But the text is concise and readable. The description is well structured. The various changes in plumage are properly described and illustrated, which is a great help in finding identification with the theme. But, no thematic order has been maintained by the poet rather, it is his mood that matters in the ordering of the poems in this elegantly produced collection of verse. — **Yogesh Kumar Sharma**, (Dept. of English, S.S.N. College, University of Delhi, Delhi - 110036) in ***The Vedic Path,*** LVIII, 4(June 2000), pp. 171-173, in ***Indian Book Chronicle,*** XXV, 8(August 2000), pp.7-8, and in ***Poet,*** XLI, 8(August 2000), pp. 61-63.

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Susheel Kumar Sharma [erstwhile] Associate Professor of English at Govind Ballabh University of Agriculture & Technology, Pantnagar offers fifty well-written poems which open a Pandora's Box of scintillating thoughts on various aspects of life. The poems give an inkling that the poet is well versed with the art of presenting his views on phenomenal existence around himself.

The poet meticulously reveals his scepticism in his poems, which by virtue of his thoughtfulness take the reader in a world of emotional revelations of poet's interaction with happenings around him. The poems enormously prove that the poet brims with newer ideas and he sets trends in his own unique style of expression.

Life, they say, is a big dream, and that the time never stops; every approaching moment indicates the turning of future into present, and each passing moment shows how fast the present changes into past, and this process continues incessantly indicating that no one can make the time to stay and hold it. The poem 'A Dream' reveals the process. The poet observes:

I tried to hold the dream
which had kept me busy
the whole night.
But like a handful of sand
In the Thar desert
only a few particles were left

stuck to my mind.
On waking up I found
I was the same white bearded man.... (p. 21)

Indeed, man's unending struggle and strife to make life a bliss whets in him a
desire to hold time, but it is elusive like rues in general drama of life and he finds himself heading towards the march to future, for there is no end to the ends of life and one suddenly finds oneself having left much of time behind to feel himself 'a white bearded man'.

The other poems in the book exhibit the poet's scepticism in its most admirable manner. They also make the reader to admire his poetic diction which makes the poems presentable and revealing. The poems on 'Gulf War' in the anthology serve the purpose of an eye-opener to the war mongering nations. A winner or a loser, war leaves its most embittered impact upon the survivors in the form of death and destruction and irreversible loss of life and contentment in public in general and also loss of faith and fraternity among rival nations. In one of the poems the poet says:

In the school
I was taught to save a man
And not to kill him. (p. 23)

And in the same breath asks a million dollar question:

Were my teachers wrong
In imparting me such education?
Perhaps, they were.
Therefore, their lessons
Could not be used
And
I and my country
Lost the war. (pp. 23-24)

It is generally seen that the scars of war become, if not permanent, longer lasting because its impact always leads to repentance over human folly, whatever be the reason. The poet feels:

Your words: 'peace', 'shelter', 'love',
'friend', 'guardian', 'protection', 'tutelary'

have lost meaning
and are empty
for they cannot
fill a hungry man's belly.
A belly needs
bullets or bread.
You cannot provide the latter. (pp. 28-29)

One recalls the apt remark of W. B. Yeats in his poem 'An Irish Airman Foresees His Death': "Those that I fight I do not hate, / Those that I guard I do not love" (ll. 3 - 4). Still imminence of war keeps one bewildering to think whether wars can be avoided, and the world is agog with the enigma of finding out a viable alternative to solution the existing enormous problems without war. Likewise, a number of other poems in the book under review entertain the reader with deep-seated emotional feelings of the poet on common human traits. At the same time, these poems reflect poet's acumen of intellect with which he has put forth his innovative thoughts with a subtle co-ordination of thoughts and imagination.

Going through the poems 'A Reverie', 'Human Decorum', 'Motherly Affection', 'Grandma', 'A Parting', 'Life' and 'Hope' one feels that the poet has enormously endeared himself among the lovers of poetry. We look forward to more such poems from the poet. — **Jasvinder Singh** (Freelance Journalist and Poet, New Delhi), in ***National Herald,*** Saturday, October 14, 2000, p. 5 and in ***The Scoria,*** III, 1(January 2001), p. 39.

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Susheel Kumar Sharma's anthology of poems provides well-written and well-thought out poems on a copious stream of topics. His poems present his precision through innovative thoughts on common human traits and his interaction with various events, which in one or the other way influence life. In his poem 'When Nadir Shah Fell Upon Delhi' the poet dwells upon the cruelty Nadir Shah perpetrated upon the people to create mass-destruction all around. He meticulously reveals in the poems the hard fact that innocence gives an epithet of crown and it is the act, which brings notoriety of cruelty. In the following lines the poet writes:

Don't murder
Innocence,
O Nadir!
You may be a Shah
Of cruelty.
But
It is
Innocence
That makes you a Shah. (p. 8)

With simplicity of language the poet makes a subtle revelation poetically.

It is very deplorable that electronic media is surpassing all the limits of decorum in the name of freedom of expression. In one-way or the other impudent show of the nudity is thrust upon the viewers. The poet in the last lines of the poem 'Human Decorum' poses a million dollar question: "Why does a man stoop so low / to earn his livelihood?" (p. 11) Most often answers to such questions become too difficult, if not impossible. The poem presents a fine example of subtle poetic diction.

Motherhood is the most venerated and adored phenomenon in human life. In our society it assumes a form of worship. The sacrifice of mother for the love of a child is incomparable. The poet presents a live picture of motherhood, which moves the reader overwhelmingly, in his poem 'Motherly Affection'.

War has always been a source of worry to the society because of irreparable damages it causes both to the aggressor and to the defender. Wars also create trauma of emotional disturbances to the kith and kin of the warriors. The third section/ poem of the 'Seven Poems on Gulf War' creates surges of emotion when the poet picturises a situation in the following lines:

I bring a piece of paper
and also a pen
and, now, I am able to

sit in a chair too.
But, words start metamorphosizing
when I recollect
soldiers with guns in their hands
tanks ready to crush human beings
souls trying to leave the bodies.... (p. 25)

The poet further writes:

My pen moves on
but the letter remains a piece of paper
only
a piece of paper
which you don't need .... (p. 25)

The poem 'Welcome' reflects the poet's finer feelings about an ideal house. The house is depicted to be a place where hospitality is always there without any discrimination. The poem reads:

My house does not have
Scorpion-infested doors,
Nor is it an island in the river of life...
You will not be able to call it
A bed of bondage.
Still, if you want to come in
You may.

Be sure
It will provide
Water to the thirsty
Tea to the exhausted
And food to the hungry. (p. 34)

Turbulence in Kashmir has become a deep-rooted problem created by our conventional rival neighbour. The poet in the poem titled 'To the Secular Indian Citizens' attributes priority to workout a viable solution to the existing enormous problems being faced by the people in Kashmir, and later to rejoice over the achievements. The poet asserts:

Smile, if you wish
but afterwards.

Shrug your shoulders,
but afterwards.
Show your helplessness,
but afterwards.
Show your tolerance
show your apathy
show your unconcern
to reveal only your cowardice
But only after listening to
the tale of
the widowhood of Mrs. Ganju,
the wiping out of Razdans and Rainas
and the tragic elimination of 'Premis'. (p. 39)

Indeed the society needs to feel concerned about the gnawing problems emanating from trans-border terrorism and allied issues, and to be courageous enough to combat with the challenge. 'Life' is another poem, which provides food for thoughts and takes the reader into introspection while appreciating the thoughtfulness of the poet. The poem depicts dilemma of common man, which he faces throughout the life and ultimately finds the solution to the complexities of life in the following lines of the poem:

I was a slave of time or of life or of body?
I stand disappointed now.
Waiting for my salvation!
Waiting for my *Mukti*! (p. 53)

The reader feels the fascination of enchanting and revealing poems, which whet the feelings of admiring the poet for a sting in his pen. The book is a treasurable gem for the lovers of poetry. Dr Sharma has endeared himself as a poet. **Jasvinder Singh** (Freelance Journalist and Poet, New Delhi), in ***Art & Poetry Today,*** XXVI, 4(October 2001), n.p.

33

From the Core Within is the second book of Dr Susheel Kumar Sharma. His first book was *The Theme of Temptation in Milton* - a critical study of John Milton's poetry. Some titles in the present collection have bearing of his first work on them. The collection begins with 'The Spineless' and ends with 'A Hope'. It is not clear whether the verses have been arranged in order of their creation or on the basis of their themes. The prominent poems in the book are – 'The Rejection of Cordial Julep', 'A Hymn' and 'Crucifixion'. The sleek volume of fifty-six poems rambles through many themes. Modern man's predicament and his moral degradation seem to be the subjects of many poems of the collection.

However, readers can trace out gradual growth of various themes if the poems are in a different order than given in the collection. The poet has shown in the poems how the hypocrisy has become the order of the day. The mask has become the face. Man's everlasting search for happiness ends up with tears. In one of the poems the poet writes:

Every face has distorted features
but none shows the signs of happiness.
Even when they try to smile
They shed a tear or two—
Not of joy. ('Relief', p.35)

The poet's inward journey diagnoses his conscience in an unorthodox manner in the following lines:

God has made me blind...
He wants me to keep away from
seeing, hearing and speaking
what is vulgar.
He wants me to keep my
senses pure and 'virgin white'. ('A Hymn', p. 10)

The first poem of the collection, 'The Spineless', beares out readers' consciousness in which the poet compares his own conscience to a 'maid servant who never bathes'. It is like a 'healthy cat' who turns pale at the sight of a dog. The poet has very successfully used different similes to bring out the intended effect and meaning. These similes create very uncommon but familiar images. He writes:

My conscience
Is like my
Family god

Who can be mutilated
By any Babar. ('The Spineless', p.1)

Although the poems are composed in Indian background the poet has journeyed through different cultures. In the poem 'Crucifixion' the east mingles with the west but the admixture fails to vitalise spiritual health of humanity. It is because "Jesus hanging on a cross —/ Is losing its colour slowly" (p. 31). The poet wishes that some day

Your carcass, Jesus,
Will fall like Indra's Vajra
On those who have converted
This world into a shop. (p. 31)

The moral degradation of our generation is highlighted the poem 'Chitrakoot' in which the poet wanders to search out his revered Ram but comes across, 'sleeping, eating, running, frowning monkeys'. This theme is further dealt with in the poems, 'Nainital-I', 'Nainital-II' and 'Nainital-III' in which the green forests are replaced with "the jungle of concrete". The Naina Temple is "more of a picnic spot" (p. 48). The poet has put the goddess, the mule, and the Mem in one line. The mule owner's boy pants for the breath like the mule and falls in the ditch never to rise. The Mem compensates his death with "a ten-rupee note … insufficient even for the shroud" (p. 49). The poet writes: "The blood from his head / made a garland for the deity" (Ibid). Although Indra's Vajra, Christ's crucifixion and many unnoticed sacrifices symbolised by the death of mule owner's son near Naina temple in Nainital have failed to salvage the humanity, hope is still there: "Believe me, I'll return/ as will return the Christ" (p. 33).

'Seven Poems on the Gulf War' falls in altogether a different category. While reading the first section of this poem one is reminded of 'Death by Water', the fourth section in T. S. Eliot's 'The Waste Land'. Susheel writes:

On the death of the sea
The birds not only weep
But also die -
Perhaps they die knowingly. (p. 22)

These are expressions of a sensible, defiant man who pays the price of the war. In these poems the poet has warned us against the disastrous consequences of war. The reference to Abel and Cain, Grandpa's withdrawal from the daily routine and confining himself to a damp corner may be viewed as man's return to primitivism.

'Mother' is a recurrent metaphor running across the collection, watching and occasionally participating in the on going, everlasting human drama depicted in these poems. This may not be a conscious effort of the poet but the 'Mother', like the *sutradhar* of a Sanskrit play not only witnesses the poet's poetic exercises but also guides the readers. She, in the last poem, turns into 'Mother Flower'. The poet writes:

'How will you
Survive this pollution, vagaries of nature',
Asked the concerned mother-flower,
'O, child?
I am too fragile to protect you
From the Sun, the wind, and the hungry animals.' (p. 71)

The poet reaffirms his faith in the survival and better future of the human race but this time with a different metaphor. "The flower was ready to multiply itself/ How come/ the mother was oblivious of the fact!" (Ibid.) The unambiguous message is that our race has survived in the past and will survive the present crises too.

The poems of this collection are worth reading, stimulating and at times thought provoking. The language and the style are typically Indian. Imagery in Susheel Kumar Sharma's poems stems out of his own personal experiences. The poems are in verse but free from monotony. The poet must have chosen to write in verse because it helps in expressing incomprehensible complexity of modern life. While the printing and production qualities are good, misprints, here and there, disrupt smooth reading. The collection may be regarded a noticeable contribution to Indian English Poetry.

— **Indra Deo Tiwari** (Professor and Head, Dept. of English, I. K. S. University, Khairagarh – 491 881. The review was accepted for publication in ***Indian Literature*** vide letter no. SA.90A / 556/ 1914/ 2000 dt. 18.4.2000.)

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EXCERPTS FROM THE LETTERS

"Your poetry promises much and evokes images unparalleled so far." **Suresh Chandra, Nagpur**

"*From the Core Within* is full of wit and humour. This tone of humour, if analysed in terms of I. A. Richards' four kinds of meaning, points to the seriousness of the intention. One is reminded of Frost and Ezekiel and would go for inter-textual reading. The poems conform to the Indo-Anglian tradition in not subjecting to the maze of obscurant western practice in poetry but in putting down the genuine feelings that seem natural in Indian context." **Nikunj Kishore Das, Jagatsingpur**

"Your poems in the book are beautiful and excellent. With rhythmic, powerful and refined words you sing of the wonder, delicacy and subtlety of the inner and outer world. The poems are impressive, elegant, and fascinating. They when read peacefully, penetrate into the reader's heart deeply and lead the reader to spiritual exaltation and perfect rapture. Your poetry is full of lofty sentiments and profound thoughts.

As you are a professor of English, your usage of words is accurate and attractive. Students taught by such a worthy poet professor as you, must be very happy." **Kazuyosi Ikeda, Osaka**

"... this creativity [in *From The Core Within*] at times is spontaneous while it is a work of labour of love at many places. The first poem, 'The Spineless' speaks to most of us and 'Nainital' poems are particularly reminiscent of our visit there. The poems are introspective even when dealing with wars and other violent themes. I must admit that I have really enjoyed them." **O. P. Juneja, Baroda**

"... I will read *[From the Core Within]* as soon as I can. But I am not likely to write about as it is not available in local book stores." **Khushwant Singh, New Delhi**

" The poems look quite good." **Omkar N. Koul, Mysore**

"A first reading tells one how very differently you have looked at the world around you. The basic honesty of your poems is what remains in one's mind long after one has finished reading them... ." **Jayanta Mahapatra, Bhubaneswar**

" The work is excellent in many ways . . . ." **J. K. Mishra, Allahabad**

"I have found your poems delightful and fascinating... ." **B. R. Nagpal, New Delhi**

" You have a sense of irony which you could develop more intensely. On the debit side, you must avoid solecisms... ." **M. K. Naik, Pune**

" As a young man sincere and sensuous in whatever you undertake you have written a remarkable number of poems and I can understand the context of your thoughts from your writing. However as happens to many of us whose sensitivity exceeds the response we get from our environment, your poems are at times sceptical and lack a totally blissful approach. ... I got to know you and your environment better by reading your poems." **Laxmi Parasuram, Kolkata**

" The choice of themes and simplicity of diction [in *From the Core Within*] moved me ... especially poems like 'Seven Poems on Gulf War'... ." **Dipti Ranjan Pattanaik, Bhubaneswar**

"The volume is your reaction — sometimes very strong — against the disagreeable situations you notice in our society: sharpers lecturing on Truth, mems flinging currency notes on dead bodies, flatterers earning money, positions, and so on. Social realism is the order of the day. A sensitive writer 'abnormal' cannot stay aloof; he must have his say, whatever the price he has to pay for it. ... you have ably combined poetry with scholarship. Yet I suggest you should not fall for 'spontaneous outbursts of powerful feelings'. Long churning, you know, throws up good quality butter. ...A good poet in making—I am sure." **I. K. Sharma, Jaipur**

"Your courage to speak the truth introspectively is reflected in 'The Spineless'. But I feel that this good poem would have been better still if you had used the word "our" for two reasons. In the first place, you are not so spineless as you have shown yourself to be. Secondly, the universal you speak should be presented as such in order to look universal and, therefore, more appealing. 'Rejection of Cordial Julep' puts forth a good recipe for life. 'A Search for the Brains' is an excellent piece of satire on the myth that great cities alone breed brains in all spheres including administration and poetry. What impressed me all the more in this poem were your apt comments on the professors turned poets. You have rightly pointed out that a poet should dive deep into the ancient culture of the country to gain inspiration. Equally engrossing is your poem, 'A Painting in Blood'. Its merit lies in its vividness and picturesqueness." **Maha Nand Sharma, Meerut**

[From the Core Within] is nicely got up and well printed... . I have casually read 'A Search for the Brains' which is a good reflection on the state of Indian English Poetry and its deans." **R.K. Singh, Dhanbad**

"I have been enjoying your poems from *From the Core Within*. It is an elegant book and well produced... ." **S. N. Tripathy, Bhubaneswar**

"I have seen some of your poems. They are certainly worth reviewing." **R. K. Kaul, Jaipur**

"Of the fifty poems in the collection I've liked sixteen the most. Of these "Is There A God Around?' has touched my heart. How easily are we confused and misled about our identity by our environs? And how much unconcerned and helpless we remain to see our descendants also fall a prey to in the same trap? How long will the Almighty keep on watching this silently? … 'Nature' and 'Wonder' have impressed me because of their content as I, too, wrote something of the sort [in my poems]. Had there been some element of satire in the last lines of the first poem in 'Seven Poems on the Gulf War', it would have been very biting. … Your personality gets clearly reflected in your poems. In my opinion, the success of a poet lies only, in perfectly communicating as to what s/he is/ stands for, how s/he lives/ survives and how s/he feels/ reacts. I felt elated to see a musing Susheel moving along with the guest around Danteshwary Temple, Kamal Vilas Palace, Bhilai Steel Plant, Kanha and the inaccessible village tracks, in a collection brought out from so far away from Khairagarh." **S. Madhur Vani, Chhuikhadan**

To begin with, the titles in the book are pretty poetic and philosophical. After all, philosophy and poetry are intertwined straight from the earliest days of Aristotle and Plato. However, it's deeply depressing to spot that you have to spend countless energy to do and undo printing mistakes. *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone*, a book I've read during our Gopalpur weeks too possesses dozens of needless mistakes. And, you won't believe that the publishing house is none other than Penguin! — an injustice done to the writer, Prof. Temsula Ao, a well-known academician in the North-East India.

Your poem, 'Treatment' reflects a strong opinion to the 'maltreatment', and pretty much pertinent here: "Let them not publish my poems". A poet accomplishes his task, 'pleasure-dome', by constructing the poem. And, it is not by publishing them that they come to life ultimately rather a poem owns a life ever since it has been scribbled out. And yet, it's completely dejecting to witness our effort, 'our precious brain child'—'creative or not' – not being cared for accordingly.

I've encountered two distinguished and noticeable elements in your volume among others 'the old English' and 'the New'. I'm not saying you are 'this', 'that' nor 'in-between'. A poet willingly never treads the same old road twice, instead seeks a greener pasture. Of course, in your case, its simple amazing to read through all the spacious range of unlimited themes. A gentleman in all-white, with a comprehending eyes and a curious face, writing on 'How to Live' and 'Crucifixion'; 'A Parting' and 'A Guest'; 'A Painting in Blood' and 'Survival'; 'The Spineless' and 'Life'; 'Is there a God Around' and 'Reality vs. Farce'; 'To the Secular Indian Citizens' and 'A Question'; 'This Civilization' and 'Believe it or not'; etc., is more than too much. I should say three much! Your 'Seven Poems on the Gulf War' moved me a great deal; in fact it has something to do with my own 'Song for Talib', 'Mad, Sad and Bad!' and 'A Drip of Ice'. Your 'Parting' sounds too Hoshyesque:

But with a heavy heart
For I am a robber
I robbed your virginity.

And, the 'bindi' and the 'sindoor' business fathom sexuality, and believe me Hoshy [Hoshang Merchant] will definitely love the ending lines. By the way, have you read his edited work *Yaarana: Gay Writing from India* — 'pretty explosive'.

Sharmaji, who is this 'virgin white' from your 'A Hymn' — spotless and colourless, wearing white all the time ? Could be you' If it is you, then what has 'virgin' to do here' I am baffled! And, who are your 'comrades' in 'Treatment'? You don't look like a person, who was a 'commie' once upon a time. I am making a reference here because I felt it is too big a term to used, no matter how spacious poetic diction could linger around within us. I too deployed once and received the matching feed-back. You know I considered myself a leftist once but had nothing to do with writing in a left-hand side.

The presence of Ezekiel [May his humble soul rest nobly in peace !] and P. Lal in 'A Search for the Brains' and in 'The Rejection of a Cordial Julep'; determine the first element I am talking about. Way back in 1998, I met a guy [a gay] who was 'Among the disciples of Ezekiel' at Hyderabad University attending a two-days national seminar on 'Recent Poetry in English in India'. The person was Raj Rao, one of Ezekiel's Scholar, from Pune University to lend a hand on Hoshy's Yaraana.

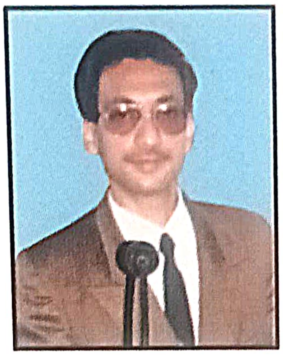
'Oh, that
Professor turned poet turned publisher
himself abandons
those whom he selects.'
'They are not brain producers
but brain devourers.'

'The Rejection of a Cordial Julep' is indeed good. The lines seconded points I'd argued earlier. P. Lal's poems on Mother Teresa, in case you haven't gone through it as yet, are quite touchy.

I enjoyed reading 'Dedication of a Transformer', a perfect Ezekielesque stuff. I even saw your naughty, wicked and big laughter while I read this particular poem. I hope the competent government still maintains electricity connection to the 'people'. Ezekiel is a great help to me as well. His 'The Professor', 'Irani Restaurant', 'Goodbye Party to...' etc., are interesting sources for my class.

Well, coming home to a closer theme 'Motherly Affection' and 'Grandma' are lovely poems but 'Reality' is not! The predictability of our unpredictable future is not very predictable. Depending upon the way we observe things — as things or at things — really handle the reality that prevails around us.

– C. Lalawmpuia Vanciau, Aizawl



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